Why do people try to change their intimate relationships?

The regulation function of ideal standards.

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Abstract

The Ideal Standards Model (Simpson, Fletcher, & Campbell, 2001) proposes that individuals evaluate and regulate their relationship and relationship partner depending on how closely perceptions match ideal standards. Support has been reported for the evaluation function (e.g., Fletcher, Simpson, Thomas, & Giles, 1999), but no research has tested the regulation function. In Study 1, individuals (N = 200) in relationships rated their self and partner: a) actual perceptions, b) ideal standards, c) ideal-perception consistency, d) desire and attempts to change both self and partner over the last 6 months, and e) perceived success of regulation attempts. In Study 2, heterosexual couples (N = 62) completed the same measures, and SEM was used to test within and cross partner associations. The results supported all predictions, and replicated across studies. First, higher self regulation was associated with lower self ideal-perception consistency (but not partner ideal-consistency), whereas higher partner regulation was associated with lower partner ideal-perception consistency (but not self ideal-consistency). Second, these relationships were moderated by success of regulation attempts. Third, ideal-perception consistency mediated the relationship between partner regulation and perceived relationship quality. Fourth, these effects replicated across three pivotal mate value dimensions (Warmth/Trustworthiness, Attractiveness/Vitality, and Status/Resources), gender and measurement strategy, and were not a function of judgment positivity. In Study 3, cross-lagged analyses suggested that ideal-perception consistency and regulation influence each other over time. Implications and explanations are discussed.

Chapter One: The Social Psychology of Regulation in Intimate Relationships

Given the importance that relationships have for psychological and physical well-being, it is no mystery why people are motivated to maintain or improve their long-term intimate relationships (see Baumeister & Leary, 1995). What remains less clear, however, are the exact conditions under which individuals are motivated to exercise regulation strategies, and why and how specific features of the relationship might be targeted for change. Despite the recognized importance of relationship regulation in social psychological accounts of relationship processes and the burgeoning amount of relationship research in the past decade, this topic has received remarkably little attention from relationship scientists. The present research addresses this lacuna.

Before delving into the existing literature it is prudent to clarify what 'relationship regulation' entails. To regulate means to adjust. Relationship regulation, therefore, can be conceptualized as adjusting (i.e., changing) the relationship. This may involve attempts to change the self, the partner, or aspects of both. Thus, I begin with a brief review of theory and research concerning self regulation and, then, theory and research regarding partner- and relationship- focused regulation.

Self Regulation

Outside the close relationship area, research dealing with why and how people regulate their own behavior has been extensive. Most models suggest that self-directed behavioral change occurs in response to a perceived discrepancy between an individual's goals and his or her current state (e.g., control systems theory, self-discrepancy theory) (Carver & Scheier, 1998; Higgins, 1987, 1997). Discrepancies between self perceptions and internal standards (goals or ideals) are proposed to produce discomfort or dissatisfaction (an

affective response) which motivates individuals to reduce the gap. The bigger the discrepancy, and the slower the discrepancy is reduced, the more intense the efforts to obtain one's goal (see Boekaerts, Pintrich, & Zeidner, 2000; Gollwitzer & Bargh, 1996; and Higgins & Kruglanski, 2000).

The most influential self regulation theory incorporating these principles is self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987, 1997), and a large body of associated research has supported the main tenets described above (for a review see Higgins, 1996). Most of this research has concentrated on the emotional consequences of experiencing a discrepancy between self perceptions and internal standards. Discrepancy is typically measured using the Selves Questionnaire (Higgins, Bond, Klien, & Strauman, 1996) which requires individuals to list attributes they believe they actually possess, as well as attributes associated with various self standards (e.g., attributes they would ideally like to possess). Across investigations, there is considerable evidence that low consistency across 'actual self' lists and 'ideal self' lists is associated with negative affect and lower self-esteem[1].

More recent research testing this model has illustrated the regulatory function of internal standards. These studies have primarily explored the relationship between self-discrepancies and the ways in which individuals reduce these discrepancies – preferred strategies or regulatory focus – including regulation designed to ensure self more closely matches standards (promotion) versus regulation designed to avoid *not* matching standards

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[1] A main principle of self-discrepancy theory is that there exist different types of standards that guide self-evaluation and regulation, including ideal standards (as reported here) and ought standards – attributes individuals believe they *should* possess. The theory postulates (and has a fair amount of supporting evidence) that discrepancies associated with different standards result in distinct emotional consequences and specific strategies of reducing discrepancies (see Higgins, 1997, 1998). Nevertheless, in both cases, the processes are the same: self-discrepancies produce negative affect, reduce self evaluation and promote regulation attempts. Because this research concentrates on the notion of ideal (as opposed to ought) standards, and for the sake of brevity, I omit an in-depth discussion of these distinctions.

(prevention) (see Higgins, 1996, 1998). Although concentrating on the type of strategies employed, these investigations have supported the notion that individuals adjust their behavior (i.e., self regulate) in response to a perceived inconsistency between self standards and actual perceptions.

In addition, self-discrepancy theory recognizes the importance of how self- evaluation and regulation can be influenced, not only by how individuals perceive themselves compared to their own standards, but also how individuals compare to the standards perceived to be held for them by close important others. Research has shown that both types of discrepancies produce negative affect and regulation responses (see Higgins, 1987; Moretti & Higgins, 1999). In extending self-discrepancy theory, Robins and Bolero (2003) also propose that individuals experience more negative self-evaluation, and relationship stability is threatened, when there exist unfavourable comparisons between self perceptions, partner perceptions and the standards both share.

These theories indicate that intimate relationship partners should provide additional standards against which individuals may self regulate (also see Leary, 2004), and low perceived consistency with relationship-relevant standards might influence relationship functioning and stability. However, the focus of related research and theory has remained on the affective and regulatory consequences that partners' (perceived) standards have on the self, and fail to consider how ideal standards may influence regulation of the partner or the relationship.

Partner and Relationship Regulation

Compared to self regulation, there is a dearth of research regarding *why* individuals attempt to change others' behavior, particularly within the intimate relationship context. In contrast, there have been extensive investigations dealing with *how* couples go about

regulating their partner and/or relationship. For example, in the last two and a half decades, over 200 studies have examined how relationship partners manage and resolve conflict. By observing the interactions of couples in problem-solving contexts, these studies have provided a rich set of typologies describing how couples approach conflict situations (see Heyman, 2001 for a review) and have identified particular behavioral patterns associated with relationship dissatisfaction and instability (for an overview of this research see Gottman, 1998; Weis & Heyman, 1997). For example, based on 20 years of research, John Gottman has found four negative communication patterns that predict marital distress (and a trajectory toward divorce): criticism, defensiveness, contempt and stonewalling (or withdrawal) (Gottman, 1994).

A separate line of research has focused on what types of strategies people use to influence their relationship partners. As with the problem-solving literature, several classification systems exist describing the various influence strategies partners' employ. These are often described by dimensions (obtained by factor analysis) such as strong, direct tactics (e.g., coercion, autocracy, reasoning, bargaining) versus weak, indirect tactics (e.g., manipulation, supplication, relationship referencing) (e.g., Bui, Raven, & Schwarzwald, 1994; Falbo & Peplau, 1980; Howard, Blumstein, & Schwartz, 1986). These studies have, in the main, concentrated on identifying factors that moderate the use of particular strategies, such as relative power, gender, and relationship satisfaction, as well as the immediate consequences of tactic use (also see Noller, Feeney, Bonnell, & Callan, 1994; Orina, Wood, & Simpson, 2002). For example, individuals who are (subjectively) closer to their partner tend to engage in relationship referencing tactics, such as appealing to relationship norms and highlighting relationship consequences, and these strategies are the most successful in influencing partners' attitudes (Orina et al., 2002).

Both types of investigation have provided valuable information regarding regulation operations within close relationships, and the predictors and consequences of various regulation strategies. However, both approaches have been quite atheoretical in terms of *why* individuals try to regulate their partner or relationship in the first instance, generally beginning their investigations at the point where conflict or influence is in full swing.

One influential social psychological theory that provides a foundation for considering the motivation behind relationship regulation is interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). The central principle of interdependence theory is that relationship partners are interdependent – that is, couple members effect each others' outcomes, and these outcomes have associated rewards and costs for the individual. The theory proposes that, when evaluating a particular relationship, individuals will compare the ratio of rewards received and the costs incurred to a generalized standard of acceptability of outcomes – a comparison level. Thus, similar to the self regulation theories described above, negative relationship evaluations (and regulation) will occur when individual's perceptions of their relationship do not meet standards or expectations.

Interdependence theory has spawned several fine-grained theories (and related research programs) on when and how individuals will try to maintain their relationships. For example, Caryl Rusbult and colleagues outline four ways in which individuals can respond when conflict exists between preferred outcomes for the individual versus the well-being of the relationship. These include exit (relationship destructive responses), neglect (e.g., withdrawing from the relationship), voice (active attempts to improve the relationship), and loyalty (passively waiting for things to improve) (Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lupkis, 1991). At face value, the voice category closely resembles my prior conceptualization of relationship regulation – to adjust or change the relationship. However,

voice responses are defined as active but constructive for the relationship, including thoughts and behaviors that help to maintain relationship well-being, e.g., refraining from reacting negatively to a partner's critical remark. The major thrust of this work concerns how individuals transform their hedonistic motivations (e.g., reacting negatively) to those that are relationship-serving via accommodation (as in the example above), willingness to sacrifice individual interests for the relationship, forgiveness, derogation of alternatives, and perceiving one's relationship as superior (see Rusbult, Olsen, Davis, & Hannon, 2004). These pro-relationship responses serve to maintain and preserve the relationship[2].

In a similar vein, an extensive body of research conducted by Sandra Murray and John Holmes has illustrated various ways in which individuals reduce relationship threats and ideal discrepancies by cognitively enhancing their relationships and romantic partners (see Murray, 2001). Like Rusbult, Murray and Holmes argue that individuals' hopes, goals and wishes are heavily dependent on their close relationship partners, and individuals are therefore motivated to maintain a positive view of their partner and relationship even when the reality may be far from perfect. In support of this contention, their research has shown that relationship quality and stability is promoted when individuals rewrite their ideals to more closely fit with the reality of their partner and/or perceive their partner to more closely resemble their ideal than the partner actually does (e.g., Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996). The upshot is that when partners do not meet expectations or ideal standards, individuals can sustain their relationship by changing their cognitions instead of trying to change their partner.

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[2] Also see Canary and Stafford (1994) and Canary and Dainton (in press) for a description of relationship maintenance strategies focused on preserving intimate relationships.

Thus, in both of the research programs described above, the core focus is on the behaviors and cognitive tactics people use to preserve their relationship in the face of undesirable relational outcomes (such as when perceptions do not meet ideal standards). They have little to say about the specific motivations involved in engaging strategies aimed at bringing about change within the relationship. Indeed, Murray's research assumes that people will go to great lengths not to change their relationships, but alter outcomes by changing the way they view their partner and relationship.

Why do People try to Change their Intimate Relationships?

To summarize, prior theory and related research concerned with self regulation and relationship regulation suggest that people are motivated to change or improve their relationship when aspects of their relationships (or partners) do not match expectations or ideal standards. In addition, this literature offers clues about the ways in which individuals may regulate their relationship, although (to reiterate) this work concentrates on the ways that individuals negotiate conflict or employ strategies to sustain, as opposed to change, their relationship.

Many questions remain unanswered. First, do individuals engage in behavioral regulation attempts (i.e., attempts to change the relationship) when they perceive their relationship falls short of ideal standards? Second, when will individuals focus on changing the self versus changing the partner? And, third, how do these regulation processes impact on relationship quality?

To answer these questions, this research draws upon the recently developed Ideal Standards Model (Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000a; Fletcher, Simpson, Thomas, & Giles, 1999; Simpson, Fletcher, & Campbell, 2001). This model incorporates similar principles to those of prior regulation theories, concerns both self and partner regulation, and

deals with how regulation processes influence relationship satisfaction and stability. Moreover, the Ideal Standards Model provides specific predictions regarding content of the motives and standards that are salient in intimate relationships. I describe and discuss this theory next.

Chapter Two: The Ideal Standards Model

The Ideal Standards Model proposes that individuals possess chronically accessible mate and relationship ideal standards that are used to evaluate both potential mates and partners in existing relationships. Similar to previous accounts of regulation, the level of consistency between ideal standards and accompanying perceptions is postulated to allow individuals to make evaluative judgments about their relationship, as well as to signal the need for regulation.

The Ideal Standards Model goes beyond self-discrepancy theories (e.g. Higgins, 1987, 1997), control theory (e.g., Carver & Scheier, 1998), and interdependence theory (e.g., Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) in several critical ways. Unlike prior theories, for example, the theoretical base of the Ideal Standards Model is informed by contemporary evolutionary principles, especially Gangestad and Simpson's (2000) Strategic Pluralism Model of human mating. The Strategic Pluralism Model proposes that both men and women should have evolved flexible mating strategies that are sensitive to environmental contingencies and that involve making specific trade-offs between qualities of mates that signal "good genes" versus "good investment" as a parent and mate.

The Ideal Standards Model proposes the existence of three major dimensions that individuals consider when evaluating (or regulating) prospective or current partners: warmth/trustworthiness, attractiveness/vitality, and status/resources. Why are these three categories so important? Selecting mates on these three mate-value dimensions could have promoted the reproductive success of our ancestors via two distinct routes – either good investment and/or good genes. The possession of warmth and trustworthiness, for example, may signal the capacity to be a good mate and parent (i.e., the motivation for good investment), whereas either the actual possession of status and resources or the drive to

obtain them might signal the ability to provide good investment. In addition, the possession of attractiveness and vitality is likely to be an indicator of good genes, signaling higher fertility and perhaps better long-term health (see Fletcher, 2002 for associated evidence).

There is considerable evidence that, across many cultures, both men and women focus on these particular dimensions when looking for long-term mates (see Buss, 1999; Fletcher, 2002). Factor analytic studies of mate importance ratings also reveal that most mate-evaluation items fall into these three categories (e.g., Fletcher et al., 1999; Fletcher, Tither, O'Loughlin, Friesen, & Overall, 2004). This three-dimensional structure also replicates well across gender, relationship status, and short-term versus long-term relationship contexts. Because the original factor analytic research was based on items generated from open-ended protocols and responses, the results suggest that these three mate-selection categories are cognitively represented in lay schemas, rather than merely existing in the minds and models of evolutionary psychologists (see Fletcher et al., 1999).

To date, research testing the Ideal Standards Model has focused on the evaluation function, revealing (as predicted) that when perceptions of the current partner and relationship more closely match an individual's ideal standards, partners and relationships are evaluated more positively (Campbell, Simpson, Kashy, & Fletcher, 2001; Fletcher et al., 1999, study 6), and break-up rates are lower (Fletcher et al., 2000a)[3]. However, the model's second major postulate — that discrepancies between perceptions and ideal standards should motivate relationship regulation attempts — has not been tested.

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[3] Also see Hasselbrauck & Aron (2001), Knee, Patrick, & Lonsbary (2003), and Ruvolo & Veroff (1997) for further evidence that consistency across perceptions and ideal standards is associated with more positive relationship evaluation, although these studies have not exploited the three dimensions described here.

The Role of the Self in Relationship Regulation

The self enters into the Ideal Standards Model in two primary ways. First, important self perceptions in relationship contexts should follow the same tripartite structure (warmth/trustworthiness, attractiveness/vitality, and status/resources) as is true of partner perceptions and judgments primarily because individuals are judged on the same mating dimensions as they judge others. Second, individuals who perceive themselves more positively on a given dimension should place greater weight on ideal standards that correspond to that dimension, and should be less flexible in their expectations of their partners with respect to that dimension. Thus, if Mary perceives herself as extremely attractive, she should set the attractiveness bar high in a potential mate, and should be less flexible in her expectations regarding her partner's attractiveness. There is evidence for both of these postulates (Campbell et al., 2001; Fletcher, 2002).

Previous accounts of the Ideal Standards Model, however, have failed to distinguish clearly between *self* versus *partner* in relation to regulation attempts and associated discrepancies between ideal standards and perceptions. Accordingly, I propose an extension of the Ideal Standards Model that makes this distinction more clearly.

Self and Partner Regulation

Figure 1 illustrates the connections between the level of consistency across perceptions and ideal standards (henceforth termed ideal-perception consistency) and the focus of resulting regulation. This model posits that the contents of mate ideal standards remain the same across both self and partner regulatory attempts (based on the arguments and evidence previously reported). However, I propose that the locus of any discrepancy (i.e., self or partner) should determine the specific focus of regulatory attempts. For example, if Mary perceives herself to be weak on the attractiveness/vitality dimension, but she attaches high

importance to self ideal standards on this dimension (low self ideal-perception consistency), she is likely to try to lose weight or increase her fitness (self regulation). However, if there is a large inconsistency between Mary's perceptions of her partner and her mate ideal standards (low partner ideal-perception consistency), regulation attempts should be directed toward the partner. For example, if Mary places considerable importance on status/resources ideal standards, but perceives her partner to have a poor job and limited potential to be financially secure, she may encourage him to retrain, look for another job, or start a savings plan (partner regulation).

		Partner Ideal-Perception Consistency **Does my partner meet my ideals?**	
		NO	**YES**
Self Ideal-Perception Consistency **Do I meet my ideals?**	**NO**	*Relationship Regulation* Regulation focuses on changing the self and partner	*Self Regulation* Regulation focuses on changing the self
	YES	*Partner Regulation* Regulation focuses on changing the partner	No need for active regulation attempts

Figure 1. Ideal-perception consistency and focus of regulation

Regulation processes should also be centered on specific ideal dimensions. Low ideal-perception consistency on one dimension (e.g., warmth/trustworthiness) should motivate regulatory efforts to attain or improve the types of attributes relevant to that particular dimension (e.g., sensitive and caring), but not attributes associated with other ideal dimensions (e.g., characteristics related to attractiveness/vitality and/or status/resources). Thus, in the current research I expected that lower ideal-perception consistency would be related to both a greater desire and more frequent attempts to change the self or the partner, but that such links should be domain-specific in two distinct ways. First, regulation should be focused on the source (self or partner) of low ideal-consistency. Second, regulation should

operate within specific mate-evaluation dimensions (warmth/trustworthiness, attractiveness/vitality, or status/resources).

In addition to predicting a specific pattern of significant and null correlations among the key variables, I also tested three distinct causal models concerning (1) how ideal-perception consistency and regulation are associated with each other over time, and (2) how regulation and ideal-perception consistency might influence relationship evaluations. I now turn to these causal models (see Figure 2).

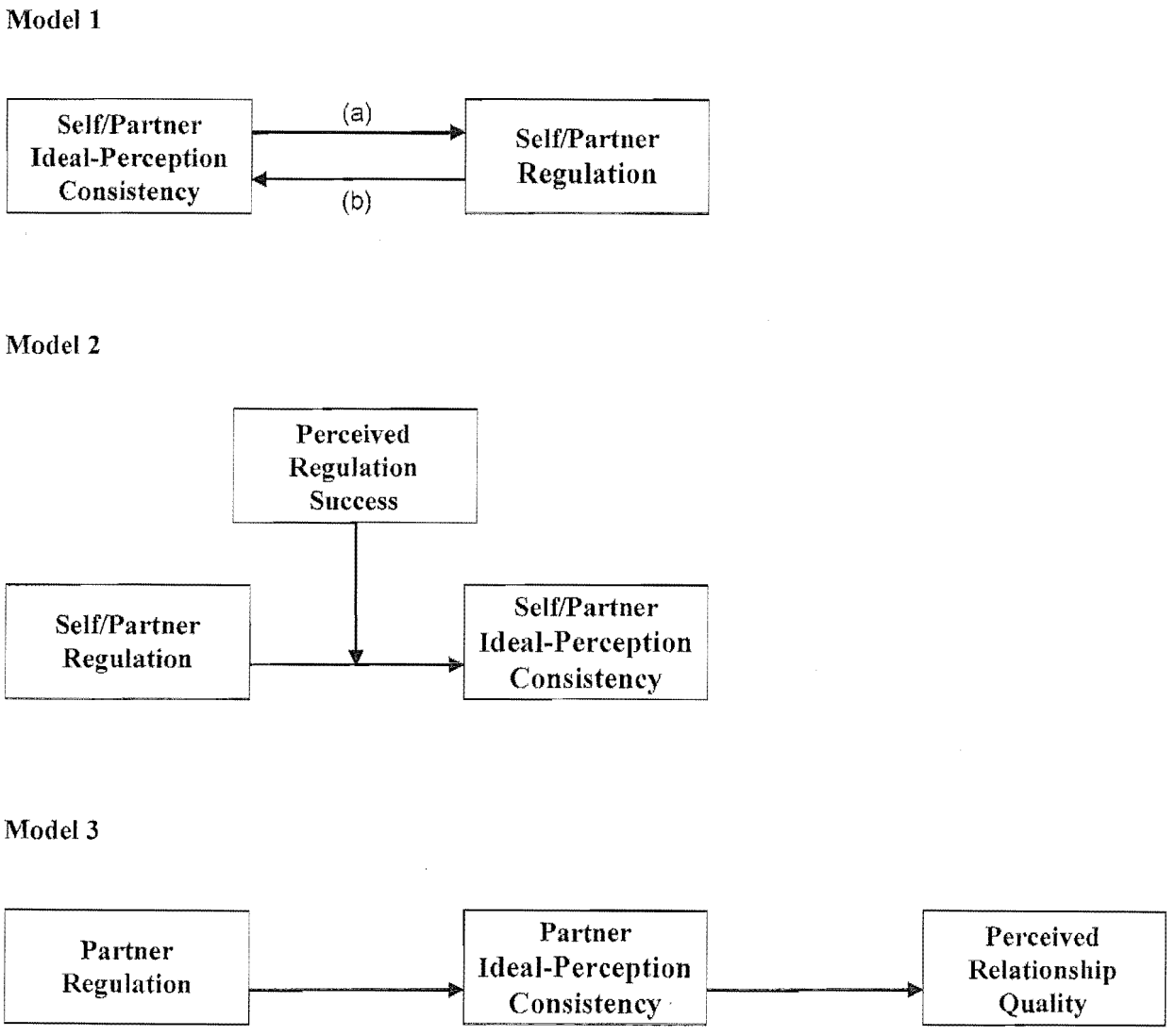

Figure 2. Models of the links between regulation, ideal-perception consistency, and perceived relationship quality.

Model 1: Links between Ideal-Perception Consistency and Regulation

Model 1 (Figure 2) suggests that the connections between ideal-perception consistency and regulation are bi-directional. Both self regulation theories and the Ideal Standards Model propose that regulation is motivated by perceptions of low ideal-consistency, suggesting a direct path from ideal-perception consistency to regulation (see Model 1, path a). Thus far, I have conceptualized the association across these variables in this way.

However, the principal motivation behind regulation is to reduce the discrepancy between current perceptions and ideal standards. Hence, regulation attempts should also feedback into and influence later judgments of ideal-perception consistency (see Model 1, path b). This model exemplifies the feedback loop described in prior accounts of self regulation (e.g., control systems theory, Carver & Scheier, 1998; also see Boekaerts et al., 2000 for further examples) in which individuals continually monitor the level of consistency between perceptions and ideal standards, including any changes in consistency arising from active regulation attempts (i.e., monitoring the effect of regulation on maintaining or increasing consistency and reducing discrepancy). Indeed, the primary consequence of regulatory behavior is a shift toward or away from a desired endpoint (i.e., goal or ideal).

Let me run through a simple example. An important standard for Mary is to be attractive and vital, yet she perceives herself to be slightly overweight and not very athletic. This inconsistency motivates Mary to join her local gymnasium (path a). Mary begins by attending aerobic classes five times a week and she loses several pounds, increasing her ideal-consistency (path b). Although she has not reached her ideal weight, Mary is more satisfied (i.e., ideal-perception consistency has increased) and her gym attendance becomes a bit more relaxed (path a). Mary's weight loss slows and she begins to regain her lost pounds,

reducing her ideal-consistency (path b), which, in turn, causes Mary to step up her exercise regime (path a).

As argued above, and evident in this example, the lower the consistency between current perceptions and ideal standards, the more individuals should desire and initiate change in specific domains. Thus, I expected that the path running from ideal-perception consistency to regulation (see Figure 2, Model 1, path a) would be negative.

The direction of the path from regulation back to ideal-perception consistency is less clear (Figure 2, Model 1, path b). According to self-perception theory (Bem, 1972), the presence of strong regulation behavior is likely to induce or maintain perceptions of low ideal-perception consistency (after all, why is one bothering to try to change self or one's partner's behavior). Moreover, attributes such as trustworthiness, attractiveness, and ambitiousness are not easily or rapidly changed in either oneself or in others (Fletcher et al., 2000a). Thus, path b is likely to be negative. Nevertheless, as illustrated in the above example, the size and direction of this path will depend on the effectiveness of regulation attempts, which brings me to Model 2.

Model 2: Ideal-Perception Consistency, Regulation, and Regulation Success

Model 2 (Figure 2) suggests that the link between regulation and ideal-perception consistency will be moderated by the success of regulation attempts. Regulation attempts that are successful should reduce discrepancies and, therefore, should be associated with (relatively) greater ideal-perception consistency. In contrast, regulation attempts that are perceived as unsuccessful should not reduce discrepancies, resulting in lower ideal-perception consistency.

However, the moderating effect of regulation success is likely to be most marked when regulation efforts are strong. For example, Mary is likely to be more disappointed at a lack of weight loss when she exercises five times a week than when she exercises once a week (perhaps because her lack of success in the first instance signals she is a long way from her ideal and that it will require a massive effort to reach her goal). Although I expected a main effect of regulation success regardless of level of regulation (i.e., individuals who are more successful should have higher ideal-perception consistency), the negative impact of low regulation success should be experienced more acutely by individuals who are working assiduously to change themselves or their partners. Therefore, individuals who have the lowest levels of ideal-perception consistency should be those who engage in substantial efforts to change the self or the partner, but who perceive such efforts to be ineffective.

Model 3: Regulation, Ideal-Perception Consistency, and Relationship Quality

Finally, I investigated how regulation and ideal-perception consistency might be tied to perceptions of relationship quality. As described above, and consistent with the Ideal Standards Model, partners who possess larger discrepancies between their ideal standards and perceptions of their partners hold more negative judgments regarding the quality of their relationship (Fletcher et al., 1999, 2000a; Campbell et al., 2001). I surmised that stronger desires for partner change and associated regulation attempts should also be associated with lower perceived relationship quality.

Recall that Model 1 (see Figure 2) proposes that ideal-perception consistency is both a cause and an effect of regulation desires and attempts. If we consider relationship satisfaction as an outcome variable, either partner ideal-perception consistency or partner regulation could be located as a mediating variable. However, I suspected that desired change and regulation attempts would influence relationship quality via their impact on perceptions of

ideal-consistency (rather than vice versa). As described above, regulation attempts occur 'in the service of creating and maintaining' consistency between perceptions of the relationship and ideal standards (Carver & Scheier, 1998, pg 12). Thus, the primary outcome of regulation attempts should be whether or not such efforts reduce or increase ideal-perception consistency, which should in turn influence judgments of relationship quality. Accordingly, I predicted that desired change and regulation attempts would mediate the relation between desired partner change, actual partner regulation and relationship quality, but not vice versa (see Model 3, Figure 2).

The role of self regulation vis-à-vis relationship quality is not as clear-cut as is true of partner regulation. Prior research has shown that more positive self perceptions of warmth/trustworthiness attributes are associated with more positive assessments of relationship quality (Fletcher et al., 1999; Campbell et al., 2001), but this is not the case for either attractiveness/vitality or status/resources. What might account for these findings? Warmth/trustworthiness is consistently rated as more important than the other dimensions in long-term relationships by both men and women (see Buss, 1999, and Fletcher, 2002, for reviews). Perhaps people who rate themselves more highly on warmth/trustworthiness make special efforts to attain happier relationships. Perhaps they select warmer and more trustworthy partners who also work harder at achieving satisfying relationships. Or perhaps they put more cognitive work into rationalizing and idealizing their partner and relationship on this dimension (see Fletcher et al., 2000a; Murray, 2001). Regardless of the explanation, I expected that greater self regulation of warmth/trustworthiness characteristics would predict lower ratings of relationship quality, but that this path would be mediated by ideal-perception consistency. I did not, however, expect regulation of other kinds of self attributes to have strong ties to relationship satisfaction.

Research Overview

Across three studies, I tested a series of novel predictions derived from the Ideal Standards Model and my proposed extensions. One major aim of the first two studies was to test the proposal (see Figure 1) that lower perceptions of ideal-consistency should be related to stronger regulation desires and attempts in intimate relationships. However, I also predicted that these links would be both specific to the locus of the discrepancy (self versus partner) and to the particular mate-evaluation dimension. Although Studies 1 and 2 involved cross-sectional samples, gathering retrospective reports of regulation behavior over the previous six months allowed me to (a) test predictions regarding how *past* regulation is associated with current perceptions of ideal-consistency (i.e., the feedback loop shown in path b of Model 1, Figure 2), and (b) test various causal models regarding the impact that regulation and regulation success might have on ideal-perception consistency and relationship evaluations (Models 2 and 3 of Figure 2).

Study 1 tested these hypotheses with a sample of individuals who were currently involved in heterosexual romantic relationships. In Study 2, predictions were tested with a sample of couples, which allowed me to test whether ideal-perception consistency and regulation desires and attempts of one individual was systematically linked to the relationship satisfaction (and other judgments) held by the partner. Campbell et al. (2002), for example, have shown that lower partner ideal-perception consistency for one partner is associated with more negative relationship quality perceived by the other partner. I expected to find the same partner effect in this research, but I also tested the extent to which regulation directed toward a partner is related to self-judgments reported by that partner. For example, if Mary tries hard to get John to communicate more sensitively and be more supportive, this may cause John to perceive himself more negatively on this domain and/or to perceive that he falls short of

Mary's standards. I tested these hypotheses using Structural Equation Modeling and predicted that the same kind of domain-specificity as predicted for self (actor) effects in Study 1 would be evident with the partner effects expected in Study 2.

In Study 3, I collected longitudinal data to test my predictions that ideal-perception consistency and regulation are negatively related across time (Model 1). Testing the longitudinal associations between ideal-consistency and regulation allowed me to test one of the most fundamental hypotheses of the Ideal Standards model; namely, whether, over time, lower levels of ideal-perception consistency motivate both stronger regulation desires and actual regulation attempts. In addition, by assessing relationship quality across time I was also able to examine further the prediction that the associations across regulation and relationship quality would be mediated by ideal-perception consistency, and not vice versa.

Chapter Three: Study One

In Study 1, individuals in heterosexual relationships rated their current perceptions, ideal standards, and ideal-perception consistency regarding both the self and the partner using the short forms of the Partner Ideal Scales developed by Fletcher et al. (1999). For each item, participants also indicated how much they desired and attempted to change themselves and their partners over the past six months, and how successful any regulation attempts had been.

There were several reasons why I chose to assess these variables in this manner. First, actual attempts to regulate self or partner can only sensibly be reported over past periods of time (rather than the present). Thus, to avoid ambiguity I specified a 6-month period. To achieve compatibility across the regulation measures, I also framed desire for change using the same format. Second, one of the aims of this research was to examine the impact of perceived regulation success. Evaluating success of regulation attempts is likely to involve an examination of how qualities have changed over time, and asking participants to report on how much they currently desire change or are trying to change self or partner would require individuals to estimate how successful these regulation attempts are likely to be (as opposed to have been). Accordingly, I measured self-reports of regulation (and regulation success) over the past six months and current perceptions of ideal-consistency. Consequently, for these data the causal path runs from regulation to ideal-perception consistency (path b, Model 1, Figure 2), allowing me to test the moderating role of regulation success (see Model 2) and the mediation model outlined in Model 3.

I tested three main hypotheses. First, I expected that there would be fairly large negative correlations between ideal-perception consistency, desire for change, and actual regulation attempts, but that these links would be domain-specific. In particular, (a) lower self ideal-perception consistency would be related to a greater desire and more strenuous attempts

to change the self (but not the partner), (b) lower partner ideal-perception consistency would be related to both greater desire and more strenuous attempts to change the partner (but not the self), and (c) lower ideal-perception consistency on one ideal dimension (e.g., warmth/trustworthiness) would be related to greater regulation of attributes on that dimension, and would remain significant when controlling for ideal-perception consistency associated with the two other ideal dimensions.

Second, the strength of the relation between past regulation attempts and current perceptions of ideal-consistency would be moderated by the perceived success of regulation (Model 2). For example, if individuals have been unsuccessful in their regulation attempts over the past six months, their ideal-perception consistency should be lower. This tendency, however, should be most marked for individuals who have tried especially hard to change themselves or their partner.

Third, stronger partner regulation should predict lower relationship quality, but this link should be mediated by ideal-perception consistency (Model 3). Specifically, stronger desires and regulation attempts in the past six months should predict lower current ideal-perception consistency, which in turn ought to predict more negative perceptions of relationship quality.

Method

Participants

One hundred males and 100 females currently involved in a romantic relationship of at least six months duration were recruited through university laboratory classes or poster advertisements at the University of Canterbury. Participants ranged from 18 to 51 years of age, with a mean age of 23.22 (SD = 6.10). Of the sample, 52 participants were living with

their partner and 30 were married. Of the remaining participants, 78 reported their relationship as serious, 36 as steady, and 4 as casual. The mean length of relationships was 33.81 months (*SD* = 47.83 months).

Measurement Strategy and Psychometric Analyses

All of the primary measures were constructed from the short forms of the Partner Ideal Scales, which were originally developed by Fletcher et al. (1999). These scales have demonstrated good internal reliability, test-retest reliability, and convergent and predictive validity when used to assess the importance of partner ideal standards, and they comprise three distinct factors (Fletcher et al., 1999; Fletcher et al., 2000a; Fletcher et al., 2004; Campbell et al., 2001). The specific scale items for the three mate ideal dimensions were: warmth/trustworthiness (understanding, supportive, kind, good listener, sensitive, and considerate), attractiveness/vitality (sexy, nice body, attractive appearance, good lover, outgoing, and adventurous), and status/resources (successful, nice house, financially secure, dresses well, and good job). The phrase *potential to achieve* was added to the items from the third ideal dimension (e.g., financially secure [or potential to achieve]).

These same 17[4] partner characteristics were also used to create the following 12 scales: (a) ideal standards (both partner and self), (b) perceptions of actual qualities (partner and self), (c) consistency between perceptions and ideal standards (partner and self), (d) desired change (partner and self), (e) actual attempts to change (partner and self), and (f) perceived success of regulation attempts (partner and self). Further details regarding these

[4] A single intelligence item was also included in all scales. Consistent with previous research (Fletcher et al., 1999), the intelligence item loaded equally across all three ideal dimensions, and was therefore analyzed separately. Because this item did not produce significant results when controlling for items on the other ideal dimensions, these results are not reported.

scales are provided below and all scales developed for this study have been included in Appendix A.

Prior research using Confirmatory Factor Analyses (CFA) has revealed that the scales used to assess partner ideal standards produce three quasi-independent factors representing the three mate ideal dimensions (Fletcher et al., 2004). I sought to replicate these findings in the current sample and, more importantly, show that the same results would emerge using CFA for the other 11 scales just described. To reduce the complexity of the CFA analyses, the items were combined for each set of measures to produce three observed variables for each ideal dimension. For all sets of scales, a model was tested comprising the combined items loading on three first-order factors (representing the three mate ideal dimensions), which in turn loaded on one higher-order factor. This model was then compared to a one-factor model consisting of all items loading on a single factor. In all cases, I predicted that the more complex higher-order model would produce a much better fit than the one-factor model. For all 12 scales, the higher-order model produced a good fit (χ^2 (25, 200) = 37.24 to 74.55, *ps* < .05, CFIs = .92 to .99, RMSEAs = .05 to .10) and a significantly better fit (χ^2change (2, 200) = 67.95 to 631.19, *ps* < .001) than did the one-factor model, which uniformly fit the data poorly (χ^2 (27, 200) = 151.70 to 543.17, *ps* <. 001, CFIs = .44 to .75, RMSEAs = .15 to .31).

These results provide preliminary but valuable evidence that the items for all of the new scales developed for this study conform to the three-factor model of mate evaluation proposed in the Ideal Standards Model. The items for each ideal dimension were also internally consistent within each scale, with Cronbach alphas ranging from .67 to .90 (see Table 1). Consequently, for each of the following measures, items within each ideal dimension were summed and averaged to provide single indexes for each ideal dimension.

Partner and self ideal standards. Participants were asked to rate each attribute in terms of the importance that it assumed in describing their ideal partner in a close relationship (dating, living together, or married) (1 = *very unimportant*, 7 = *very important*). For the self ideal standards measure, participants completed the same scales in relation to how they themselves would ideally like to be in a close relationship. Higher scores for each ideal dimension reflect higher expectations for an individual's ideal partner and ideal self.

Partner and self perceptions. Participants were also asked to rate each attribute in terms of how accurately it described their current romantic partner (1 = *not at all like my partner*, 7 = *very much like my partner*), and how accurately the attribute described themselves (1 = *not at all like myself*, 7 = *very much like myself*). Mean scores were calculated for each ideal dimension, with higher scores reflecting more positive self and partner perceptions.

Partner and self ideal-perception consistency. Measuring consistencies or discrepancies between two variables can be accomplished in several ways (Griffin, Murray, & Gonzalez, 1999). I used two methods to ensure that our results were not subject to measurement artifacts. The first (direct) self-report measure asked participants to compare their current partner (or self) to their expectations regarding their ideal partner (or ideal self). Participants were asked to rate each attribute according to the degree to which their current romantic partner (or self) matched their ideal partner (or self) (1 = *does not match my ideal at all*, 7 = *completely matches my ideal*). Mean scores were calculated separately for each ideal dimension. Higher scores indicate greater consistency between an individual's self/partner ideal standards and his or her self/partner perceptions. This methodology has produced valid and reliable results in prior research (e.g., Campbell et al., 2001).

Because participants completed separate scales for the importance of ideal standards and perceptions of actual mate value (for both the self and the partner), a second (indirect) measure for both self and partner ideal-perception consistency could be calculated by regressing mean levels of perceptions on mean levels of ideal standards for each ideal dimension. The standardized residuals from this regression were then treated as an index of ideal-perception consistency, with more negative residuals representing a greater discrepancy between current perceptions and ideal standards relative to the sample (see Griffin et al., 1999). This indirect method avoids possible demand characteristics associated with the direct method, and has also produced valid and reliable results in prior research (e.g., Knee, Nanayakkara, Vietor, Neighbors, & Patrick, 2001).

Partner and self regulation. For each attribute, participants also rated the extent to which they (1) desired change in that aspect of their partner (or themselves) during the past six months (1 = *no desire to change*, 7 = *strong desire to change*), (2) tried in some way to change that aspect of their partner (or themselves) during the past six months (1 = *not tried at all to change*, 7 = *tried hard to change*), and (3) the extent to which they were successful in any attempts to change that aspect of their partner (or themselves) (1 = *attempts have not been successful*, 7 = *attempts have been successful*). Higher scores represent a stronger desire to change, stronger efforts to change, and higher perceived success in changing attributes or behaviors. If participants had not tried to change a particular aspect of themselves or their partners (i.e., they reported 1 for question 2 above), they were instructed to report 1 for question 3 regarding how successful regulation attempts have been. Individuals who reported zero regulation attempts for a particular ideal dimension were subsequently excluded from all of the analyses involving regulation success.

Relationship quality. The short version of the PRQC inventory (Fletcher, Simpson & Thomas, 2000b) was used to assess relationship quality. This scale has good internal reliability and predictive validity (Fletcher et al., 2000a, 2000b). The short version consists of 7 items that most directly tap each component of relationship quality that the inventory was designed to measure: satisfaction, commitment, intimacy, trust, passion, love, and romance (e.g., How satisfied are you with your relationship?) Participants were asked to rate each item with reference to their current romantic relationship (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *extremely*). All items were summed and averaged to provide an overall index of relationship quality, with higher scores indicating greater perceived quality. This measure had good internal reliability (Cronbach alpha = .83).

Self-esteem. Self-esteem was measured by the Rosenberg (1965) self-esteem scale, which assesses global feelings of self-worth. Participants were asked to rate the extent of their agreement to a series of ten statements about themselves (e.g., "On the whole, I am satisfied with myself") (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Items were keyed so that higher scores indicated higher self-esteem (i.e., more positive self-worth), and the items were then averaged to form an overall self-esteem score. The scale had good internal consistency (Cronbach alpha = .90).

Procedure

Participants completed the entire set of questionnaires individually or in same-sex groups of 2-3 people. Participants were first provided with general information about the study, assured of their anonymity and the confidentiality of all information, and informed they could withdraw from the study at any stage. Both written and verbal instructions were provided to ensure the accurate completion of all scales, and participants were instructed to complete the questionnaires in sequence without reviewing previous answers. Once consent

was obtained, participants were asked to provide their gender, age, relationship status, and length of current relationship. Participants then completed the PRQC inventory and the self-esteem scale.[5] Finally, participants completed all the scales described previously concerning ideal standards, perceptions, and regulation. The order in which these scales were presented was counterbalanced within each gender so that: (a) half of the sample answered the six scales concerning the self prior to the six scales concerning the partner, and (b) half of the sample answered the six scales assessing ideal standards, perceptions and ideal-perception consistency before the scales assessing regulation.[6]

Results

Descriptive statistics. Means, standard deviations, and internal reliabilities for all scales are shown in Table 1. Previous research has found a specific pattern of gender differences in the importance that women and men place on the three mate ideal dimensions (e.g., Fletcher et al., 1999). Therefore, I conducted a 2 (gender) x 3 (partner ideal ratings for the three dimensions) ANOVA, with the last factor as a repeated measure, to replicate this pattern. Both main effects for gender, $F(1, 198) = 8.18$, $p < .01$, and ideal dimension, $F(2, 396) = 198.30$, $p < .01$, were significant, but were qualified by a significant interaction, $F(2, 396) = 29.14$, $p < .01$. Consistent with an evolutionary perspective and prior research (Fletcher et al., 1999), both men and women rated warmth/trustworthiness attributes as most important for their ideal romantic partner. As expected, planned comparisons revealed that

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[5] At this point, participants also completed some additional questionnaires that are not germane to the current study. Hence, they are not described.

[6] To examine whether order produced any mean differences across the main variables, a series of 3 (ratings across all three ideal dimensions) x 2 (receiving self vs partner scales first) x 2 (receiving ideal/perceptions vs regulation scales first) ANOVAs, with the first factor as repeated measures, were run. Only one main effect for order was significant out of a total 20 possible main effects (below chance levels) and the mean differences were not theoretically meaningful.

women reported higher partner ideal standards for warmth/trustworthiness (F (1, 198) = 4.12, $p < .05$) and status/resources (F (1, 198) = 27.69, $p < .01$) than did men, whereas men rated attractiveness/vitality attributes as more important in their ideal partner (F (1, 198) = 5.50, $p < .05$) than women did.

I also ran equivalent ANOVAs across the remaining scales and found significant main effects across ideal dimensions for all scales, and six (out of nine) significant interaction effects. As shown in Table 1, warmth/trustworthiness was rated most highly across scales, with the exception of desired self change and self regulation for which status/resources was rated most highly (which is not surprising, given a university sample). Although post-hoc comparisons were non-significant, an examination of the means across gender indicated that men reported higher desire and attempts to change the attractiveness/vitality of their partners, had lower warmth/trustworthiness self perceptions and self ideal-consistency ratings, and reported higher desire and attempts to change warmth/trustworthiness self attributes. These effects are consistent with the pattern described above. However, given that they were not the primary focus of Study 1, they are not discussed in greater detail.

Measures of ideal-perception consistency. As described previously, ideal-perception consistency was measured in two ways: using a direct method (which asked participants the extent to which they and their partner met their ideal standards), and using an indirect method (which used the residuals from regressing perceptions on ideals). For all three ideal dimensions, the direct and indirect measures of ideal-perception consistency were strongly correlated for both self (rs = .58 to .77, ps < .01) and partner (rs = .69 to .85, ps < .01).

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Reliability Coefficients of all Scales (Study 1)

	Total	Females	Males	IR		Total	Females	Males	IR
Partner ideal standards					**Self ideal standards**				
Warmth/Trustworthiness	6.00 (0.73)	6.16 (0.77)	5.84 (0.66)	.85	Warmth/Trustworthiness	6.18 (0.60)	6.27 (0.56)	6.10 (0.63)	.79
Attractiveness/Vitality	4.85 (0.87)	4.66 (0.87)	5.03 (0.83)	.75	Attractiveness/Vitality	4.97 (0.96)	4.94 (1.00)	5.00 (0.93)	.79
Status/Resources	4.50 (1.19)	4.92 (1.00)	4.09 (1.22)	.84	Status/Resources	4.82 (1.28)	4.95 (1.14)	4.68 (1.40)	.90
Partner perceptions					**Self perceptions**				
Warmth/Trustworthiness	5.60 (0.94)	5.67 (0.93)	5.53 (0.94)	.86	Warmth/Trustworthiness	5.53 (0.86)	5.74 (0.80)	5.32 (0.88)	.81
Attractiveness/Vitality	5.35 (0.85)	5.46 (0.80)	5.24 (0.90)	.72	Attractiveness/Vitality	4.70 (0.88)	4.65 (0.88)	4.73 (0.88)	.76
Status/Resources	5.29 (1.07)	5.24 (1.03)	5.33 (1.10)	.82	Status/Resources	5.24 (1.00)	5.27 (0.83)	5.22 (1.13)	.84
Partner ideal-perception consistency					**Self ideal-perception consistency**				
Warmth/Trustworthiness	5.68 (0.99)	5.75 (1.02)	5.60 (0.96)	.88	Warmth/Trustworthiness	5.31 (1.07)	5.51 (1.08)	5.11 (1.03)	.86
Attractiveness/Vitality	5.47 (0.95)	5.59 (0.91)	5.35 (0.98)	.79	Attractiveness/Vitality	4.65 (1.05)	4.54 (1.09)	4.75 (1.00)	.79
Status/Resources	5.53 (1.10)	5.54 (1.06)	5.52 (1.14)	.86	Status/Resources	5.02 (1.10)	5.03 (1.00)	5.01 (1.19)	.86
Desired partner change					**Desired self change**				
Warmth/Trustworthiness	2.85 (1.39)	2.83 (1.45)	2.87 (1.33)	.84	Warmth/Trustworthiness	3.40 (1.37)	3.05 (1.32)	3.73 (1.34)	.80
Attractiveness/Vitality	2.63 (1.30)	2.34 (1.23)	2.92 (1.30)	.75	Attractiveness/Vitality	4.01 (1.30)	4.17 (1.43)	3.85 (1.15)	.73
Status/Resources	2.68 (1.53)	2.75 (1.52)	2.61 (1.55)	.80	Status/Resources	4.17 (1.68)	4.02 (1.85)	4.31 (1.49)	.81
Partner regulation					**Self regulation**				
Warmth/Trustworthiness	2.46 (1.22)	2.46 (1.27)	2.45 (1.17)	.81	Warmth/Trustworthiness	3.16 (1.30)	2.91 (1.18)	3.42 (1.35)	.78
Attractiveness/Vitality	2.24 (1.10)	2.04 (1.06)	2.44 (1.11)	.72	Attractiveness/Vitality	3.52 (1.15)	3.61 (1.19)	3.43 (1.11)	.67
Status/Resources	2.30 (1.30)	2.38 (1.33)	2.22 (1.26)	.77	Status/Resources	3.63 (1.46)	3.49 (1.63)	3.76 (1.27)	.75

Table 1 continued	Total	Females	Males	IR		Total	Females	Males	IR
Partner regulation success[1]					**Self regulation success**[1]				
Warmth/Trustworthiness	2.74 (1.10)	2.73 (1.06)	2.73 (1.15)	.70	Warmth/Trustworthiness	3.29 (1.17)	3.45 (1.24)	3.11 (1.08)	.67
N	174	87	87		N	192	97	95	
Attractiveness/Vitality	2.37 (1.05)	2.48 (1.14)	2.24 (0.93)	.65	Attractiveness/Vitality	3.34 (1.11)	3.36 (1.13)	3.32 (1.10)	.67
N	172	93	79		N	196	98	98	
Status/Resources	2.65 (1.21)	2.70 (1.28)	2.61 (1.15)	.63	Status/Resources	3.55 (1.21)	3.65 (1.17)	3.43 (1.24)	.64
N	155	74	86		N	183	97	86	
Relationship quality	5.81 (0.77)	6.00 (0.70)	5.63 (0.80)	.83					
Self-esteem	5.41 (1.01)	5.30 (1.11)	5.53 (0.90)	.90					

Note. All scores were converted to 7-point scales for ease of comparison. Standard deviations appear in parentheses. IR = internal reliability - Cronbach alphas.

[1] Descriptive data regarding success of regulation attempts only include participants who reported actually attempting to change themselves or their partner on specific ideal dimensions. Thus, the sample sizes vary across groups for these analyses.

Testing the Ideal Standards Model: Links between ideal-perception consistency and regulation. The central predictions derived from the Ideal Standards Model were that: (a) individuals who perceived lower consistency between partner perceptions and partner ideal standards should experience greater desire and report more attempts to change their partners, whereas (b) individuals who perceived lower consistency between self perceptions and self ideal standards should experience greater desire and report more attempts to change the self. These predictions translate into a very specific pattern of convergent and discriminant correlations, which are shown in Table 2.

There was excellent support for these predictions, regardless of whether the direct or the indirect measures of ideal-perception consistency were used. Examining first the zero-order correlations between partner ideal-perception consistency and partner desired change and regulation attempts (see the top half of Table 2), all of the 12 correlations I predicted would be negative (shown in boldface) were significant. That is, across the three ideal dimensions, individuals who perceived less consistency between their partner perceptions and their partner ideal standards experienced greater desire to change their partner and reported more attempts to change their partner. As expected, there was no evidence for strong negative associations between partner ideal-perception consistency and desired self change and self regulation attempts, although eight of the 12 correlations were significant. As predicted, however, when comparing the pairs of correlations with partner ideal-perception consistency (see top half of Table 2), all 12 correlations with desired change or regulation attempts of the partner were significantly more negative than correlations with desired change or regulation attempts with reference to the self.

Table 2

Correlations between Ideal-Perception Consistency and Desired Change and Regulation Attempts of Self and Partner (Study 1)

	Desired Change			Regulation Attempts		
	Self	**Partner**	**t**	**Self**	**Partner**	**t**
Partner						
Ideal-perception consistency (Direct)						
Warmth/Trustworthiness	-.26** (.06)	**-.73** (-.67**)**	8.29**	-.23** (.14*)	**-.59** (-.56**)**	5.90**
Attractiveness/Vitality	-.17* (.09)	**-.60** (-.55**)**	6.24**	-.09 (.11)	**-.43** (-.42**)**	4.54**
Status/Resources	-.23** (.02)	**-.49** (-.32**)**	4.07**	-.14* (.02)	**-.35** (-.23**)**	3.02**
Ideal-perception consistency (Indirect)						
Warmth/Trustworthiness	-.21** (.07)	**-.67** (-.61**)**	7.57**	-.18* (.08)	**-.50** (-.45**)**	4.91**
Attractiveness/Vitality	-.10 (.15*)	**-.58** (-.57**)**	6.90**	-.07 (.14*)	**-.47** (-.46**)**	5.48**
Status/Resources	-.15* (.13)	**-.49** (-.40**)**	5.37**	-.13 (.07)	**-.36** (-.31**)**	3.32**
Self						
Ideal-perception consistency (Direct)						
Warmth/Trustworthiness	**-.49** (-.48**)**	-.15* (.08)	4.83**	**-.31** (-.31**)**	-.07 (.10)	3.38**
Attractiveness/Vitality	**-.28** (-.26**)**	.02 (.19**)**	3.73**	**-.16*** (-.18*)	.06 (.19**)**	2.72**
Status/Resources	**-.30** (-.23**)**	-.13 (.03)	2.45*	**-.13** (-.09)	-.06 (.02)	0.95
Ideal-perception consistency (Indirect)						
Warmth/Trustworthiness	**-.40** (-.43**)**	-.04 (.14*)	4.93**	**-.24** (-.32**)**	.07 (.21**)**	4.36**
Attractiveness/Vitality	**-.21** (-.22**)**	.03 (.14*)	2.92**	**-.10** (-.15*)	.10 (.18*)	2.46*
Status/Resources	**-.22** (-.21**)**	-.03 (.07)	2.69**	**-.10** (-.13*)	.03 (.09)	1.77

Note. *t* statistics are dependent *r* comparisons between correlations for self- and partner- desired change and regulation; df = 197. Correlations in boldface are those predicted to be negative. Correlations in parentheses for desired partner change and partner regulation attempts control for ideal-perception consistency across the two other ideal dimensions and for self desired change/regulation attempts on the specific ideal dimension. Correlations in parentheses for desired self change and self regulation attempts control for ideal-perception consistency across the remaining two ideal dimensions and for partner desired change/regulation attempts on the specific ideal dimension.

*$p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

The predictions for the measures of self ideal-perception consistency (see the bottom half of Table 2) were also generally supported. First, of the 12 zero-order correlations predicted to be negative (shown in boldface), nine were significant. Second, 11 of the 12 correlations predicted to be nonsignificant were indeed nonsignificant. Moreover, when I compared the pairs of correlations with self ideal-perception consistency (see the bottom half of Table 2), 10 of the 12 correlations with desired change or regulation attempts of the self were significantly more negative than correlations with desired change or regulation attempts of the partner. Thus, replicating the pattern with partner ideal-perception consistency described earlier, across the ideal dimensions, individuals who perceived lower consistency between their self perceptions and their self ideal standards experienced greater desire to change the self and reported more attempts to change the self. In contrast, however, there was little evidence of any significant links between self ideal-perception consistency and either desired change in the partner or regulation attempts of the partner.

Alternative Explanations

Although the pattern of zero-order correlations generally supported our predictions, some caveats and alternative artifactual explanations should be considered. Perhaps not surprisingly, self and partner regulation variables were positively correlated; that is, individuals who desired and attempted to change the self on a given ideal dimension were more likely to desire and attempt to change the partner on the same ideal dimension (*r*s ranged from .30 to .48, *p*s < .01). It is possible, of course, that the pattern of convergent and discriminant correlations might change if the associations across partner ideal-consistency and partner regulation were recalculated controlling for self regulation (and vice versa).

In addition, the pattern of negative correlations could reflect overall evaluative or halo effects. The CFA findings reported previously support the possibility that participants

responded differently across the three ideal dimensions rather than simply in terms of a higher-order evaluative mate-value factor. However, the same CFA results also suggested that for every one of the tripartite measures, the three ideal dimensions also loaded on unitary second-order factors. The three ideal dimensions, therefore, are not completely independent. To provide a rigorous test of this alternative explanation, each correlation in Table 2 was recalculated controlling for the ideal-perception consistency responses obtained for the other two ideal dimensions. For example, the correlation between partner ideal-perception consistency (the direct measure) and desired partner change for warmth/trustworthiness (see Table 2, first row, second correlation, $r = -.73$) was recalculated controlling for partner ideal-perception consistency on both attractiveness/vitality and status/resources.

The partial correlations, displayed in Table 2 in parentheses, reveal the effects of controlling for these two factors (overall evaluation and reports of either self or partner desired change and regulation). As can be seen, the pattern of convergent and discriminant correlations actually became sharper and even more supportive of predictions. Of the 24 correlations I expected to be negative, 23 were significant. Of the 24 correlations I predicted would not be negative, none were significantly negative. These results support a key prediction of the Ideal Standards Model — that the links between ideal-perception consistency and regulation are funneled through specific ideal domains rather than via global, higher-order perceptions of mate value.

Intriguingly, and unexpectedly, some of the significant *positive* partial correlations obtained (see Table 2, top half) suggested that the more highly individuals perceived their partner as matching their ideal standards on a given ideal dimension (in particular attractiveness/vitality), the more they desired and attempted to change the self on that ideal dimension. Similarly, the more closely individuals matched their own ideal standards on

specific ideal dimensions (see Table 2, bottom half) (particularly warmth/trustworthiness and attractiveness/vitality) the more they desired and attempted to change their partner on the same ideal dimensions. These results highlight important dynamics that may be operating at the relationship level.

Finally, one might argue that the impact of low ideal-perception consistency on desired change and regulation is simply produced by more negative perceptions of self and partner within each dimension (as opposed to the gap between perceptions and ideal standards). Recall that I collected ratings of self and partner perceptions across the three ideal dimensions. Thus, I was able to rule out this possible explanation by regressing desired change and regulation attempts on both ideal-perception consistency and perceptions simultaneously[7]. For 11 out of 12 analyses, ideal-perception consistency remained a significant predictor of regulation desires and attempts across ideal dimensions (βs = -.21 to -.60, $p < .05$) (the exception was status/resources self regulation which was not significant at the zero-order level; see Table 2). In contrast, in 10 out of 12 analyses, perceptions failed to significantly predict desired change or regulation when ideal-perception consistency was controlled (βs = -.00 to -.16, $p > .05$)[8].

These results provide formidable evidence for the core hypothesis of the Ideal Standards Model – that regulation is driven by the extent to which perceptions match ideal standards (and vice versa), and not simply by how positively or negatively self and partner are viewed (see Table B1, Appendix B for more detailed results of these analyses).

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[7] Note: these analyses could only be run with the direct measure of ideal-perception consistency since the perception ratings form part of the indirect measure.

[8] Partner perceptions of attractiveness/vitality continued to predict desired partner change and partner regulation (βs = -.20 and -.24, $p < .05$ respectively). However, even in these cases, partner ideal-perception consistency remained a significant predictor.

Does perceived regulation success moderate the link between regulation and ideal-perception consistency? As shown in Figure 2 (Model 2), I hypothesized that the relation between ideal-perception consistency and regulation should be moderated by perceived regulation success. In other words, individuals who tried harder to change the partner or the self in the previous six months should generally have lower levels of ideal-perception consistency, but this pattern should be more pronounced for those who were less successful in their regulation attempts.

To test these predictions, hierarchical regression analyses were performed separately for each ideal dimension with ideal-perception consistency as the dependent variable. In the first step of each analysis, regulation and perceived success of regulation were entered as predictors, after which the interaction term was entered in step 2. Only data from those individuals who reported actually attempting at least some regulation with respect to specific ideal dimensions were included in each analysis. Table 3 displays the standardized regression coefficients for each ideal dimension.

Dealing first with the analyses involving perceptions of the partner (see the top half of Table 3), the main effects for partner regulation attempts were significant for each ideal dimension, revealing that the more individuals tried to change their partners, the less they perceived their partners as meeting their ideal standards. The main effects for perceived regulation success were also significant for all three dimensions, indicating that individuals who perceived their regulation attempts as less successful also perceived lower ideal-perception consistency. Finally, just as predicted, the interaction between partner regulation attempts and perceived regulation success was significant for the warmth/trustworthiness and the status/resources dimensions.

Table 3

Standardized Regression Coefficients for all Dimensions Testing Whether Regulation Success Moderated the Links between Regulation Attempts and Ideal-Perception Consistency (Study 1)

		Perceived Ideal-Perception Consistency (Partner or Self)					
		Direct Measure			Indirect Measure		
	N	β	t	Semi-partial r^2	β	t	Semi-partial r^2
Partner Regulation Attempts							
Warmth/Trustworthiness	174						
Partner regulation		-.88	10.26**	0.37	-.81	9.00**	0.32
Regulation success		.47	5.49**	0.11	.52	5.79**	0.13
Interaction		.90	3.69**	0.05	.83	3.19**	0.04
Attractiveness/Vitality	172						
Partner regulation		-.75	7.16**	0.23	-.85	8.56**	0.30
Regulation success		.52	4.96**	0.11	.56	5.67**	0.13
Interaction		.35	1.29	0.01	.45	1.75[a]	0.01
Status/Resources	155						
Partner regulation		-.70	5.95**	0.19	-.66	5.53**	0.17
Regulation success		.57	4.83**	0.12	.50	4.20**	0.10
Interaction		.99	3.64**	0.07	.87	3.14**	0.05
Self Regulation Attempts							
Warmth/Trustworthiness	192						
Self regulation		-.81	6.94**	0.20	-.75	6.28**	0.17
Regulation success		.59	5.02**	0.11	.60	4.98**	0.11
Interaction		1.25	3.91**	0.06	1.32	4.04**	0.07
Attractiveness/Vitality	196						
Self regulation		-.60	6.20**	0.16	-.50	5.11**	0.11
Regulation success		.60	6.20**	0.16	.59	6.03**	0.16
Interaction		-.02	0.05	0.00	.36	1.13	0.01
Status/Resources	183						
Self regulation		-.31	2.60*	0.04	-.29	2.37*	0.03
Regulation success		.45	3.70**	0.07	.43	3.57**	0.06
Interaction		.43	1.16	0.01	.39	1.05	0.01

Note. These analyses include only participants who reported regulation attempts for the specific ideal dimension. Main effects have been calculated without the interaction. The dependent variable (ideal-perception consistency) consisted of partner perceptions when the independent variables were partner focused (the top half of table) and self perceptions when the independent variables were self focused (the bottom half of table).

[a]$p<.10$. *$p<.05$. **$p<.01$.

These results were consistent across the two types of ideal-consistency measures (direct and indirect), and the nature of the significant interactions were the same across measures. Figure 3 illustrates both interactions (as measured by direct ideal-perception consistency). Although more strenuous efforts to change the partner were typically associated with lower ideal-perception consistency, this trend was more marked for individuals who were less successful in accomplishing change. This interaction was not significant for the attractiveness/vitality ideal dimension.

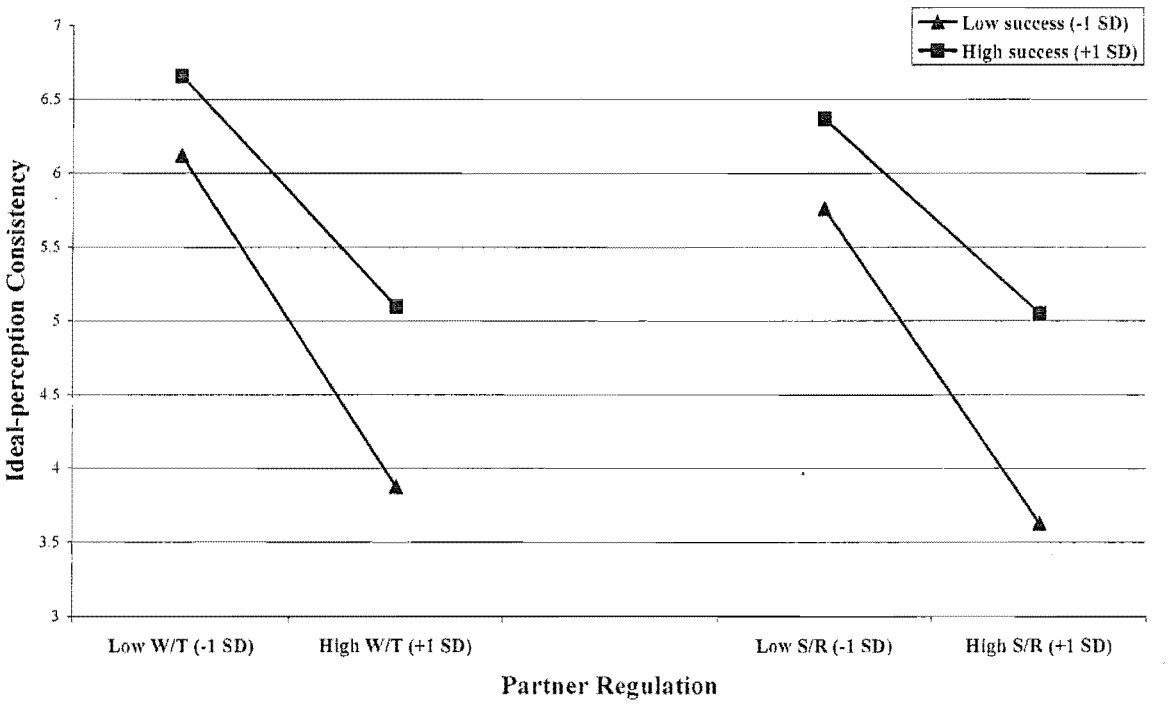

Figure 3. Interaction of partner regulation and regulation success on the warmth/ trustworthiness and status/resources dimensions

Note. W/T = Warmth/Trustworthiness and S/R = Status/Resources. Low scores are 1 SD below the mean; high scores are 1 SD above the mean.

The next set of analyses focus on the interaction between self regulation and regulation success on self ideal-perception consistency (see the bottom half of Table 3). The same pattern of results was found for the self (as for the partner) with respect to the anticipated main effects. For all three ideal dimensions, more strenuous self regulation

attempts, and less perceived success of self regulation, were associated with lower ideal-perception consistency. However, the only significant interaction was found on the warmth/trustworthiness ideal dimension, and this was true for both direct and indirect measures of ideal-perception consistency. The nature of the interaction is illustrated in Figure 4 (using the direct ideal-consistency measure). Consistent with the prior moderating results, more effortful regulation attempts were strongly associated with lower self ideal-perception consistency, but this tendency was more marked if regulation attempts were viewed as unsuccessful.

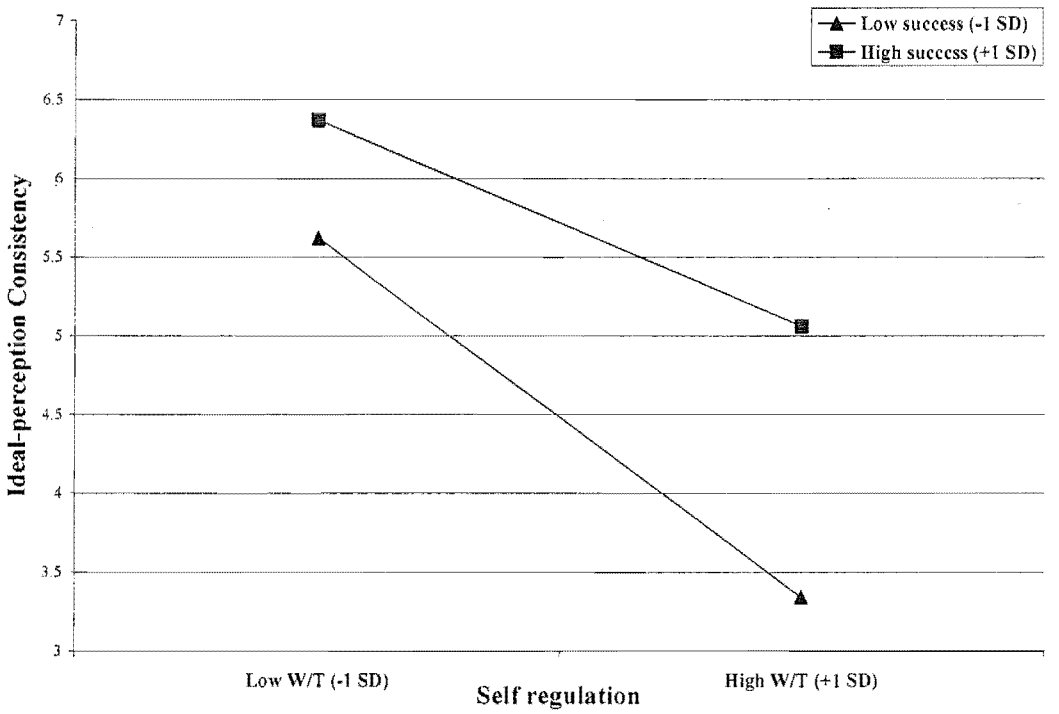

Figure 4. Interaction of self regulation and regulation success on the warmth/ trustworthiness dimension

Note. W/T = Warmth/Trustworthiness. Low scores are 1 SD below the mean; high scores are 1 SD above the mean.

Does ideal-perception consistency mediate the link between partner regulation and relationship quality? I predicted that ideal-perception consistency would mediate the link between partner regulation and relationship quality (see Figure 2, Model 3). In order to demonstrate mediation, four conditions must be met (see Baron & Kenny, 1986). First,

partner regulation must be significantly associated with perceived relationship quality. Second, partner regulation must be significantly associated with partner ideal-perception consistency. Third, partner ideal-consistency must be significantly associated with relationship quality when controlling for regulation attempts. Finally, the size of the path from partner regulation to perceived relationship quality should be significantly reduced when partner ideal-perception consistency is controlled.

The mediation model was tested with reports of both desired partner change and actual partner regulation attempts. The results of the path analyses using multiple regression are shown in Figure 5 for both direct and indirect measures of ideal-perception consistency (coefficients for the direct measure are presented first, followed by a slash, then coefficients for the indirect measure are reported). Solid support was marshaled for the mediation model for both desired partner change and actual regulation attempts across all three dimensions (warmth/trustworthiness, attractiveness/vitality, and status/resources), regardless of whether the model was tested with the direct or the indirect measures of ideal-perception consistency. In all cases, a greater desire to change the partner and more effortful attempts to regulate the partner during the prior six months predicted lower partner ideal-perception consistency, which in turn fed into more negative perceptions of relationship quality. Moreover, the indirect effect (equivalent to the drop in the direct path between desired change or regulation attempts and relationship quality when the mediating variable was controlled) was significant in all cases, zs = 3.21 to 6.80, ps < .01.[9]

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[9] Note that the initial path between status/resources partner regulation and relationship quality was not statistically significant although in the predicted direction (r = -.11). However, controlling for ideal-perception consistency still reduced this path significantly (zs = 3.64 and 3.21, ps < .01, using the direct and indirect measures respectively).

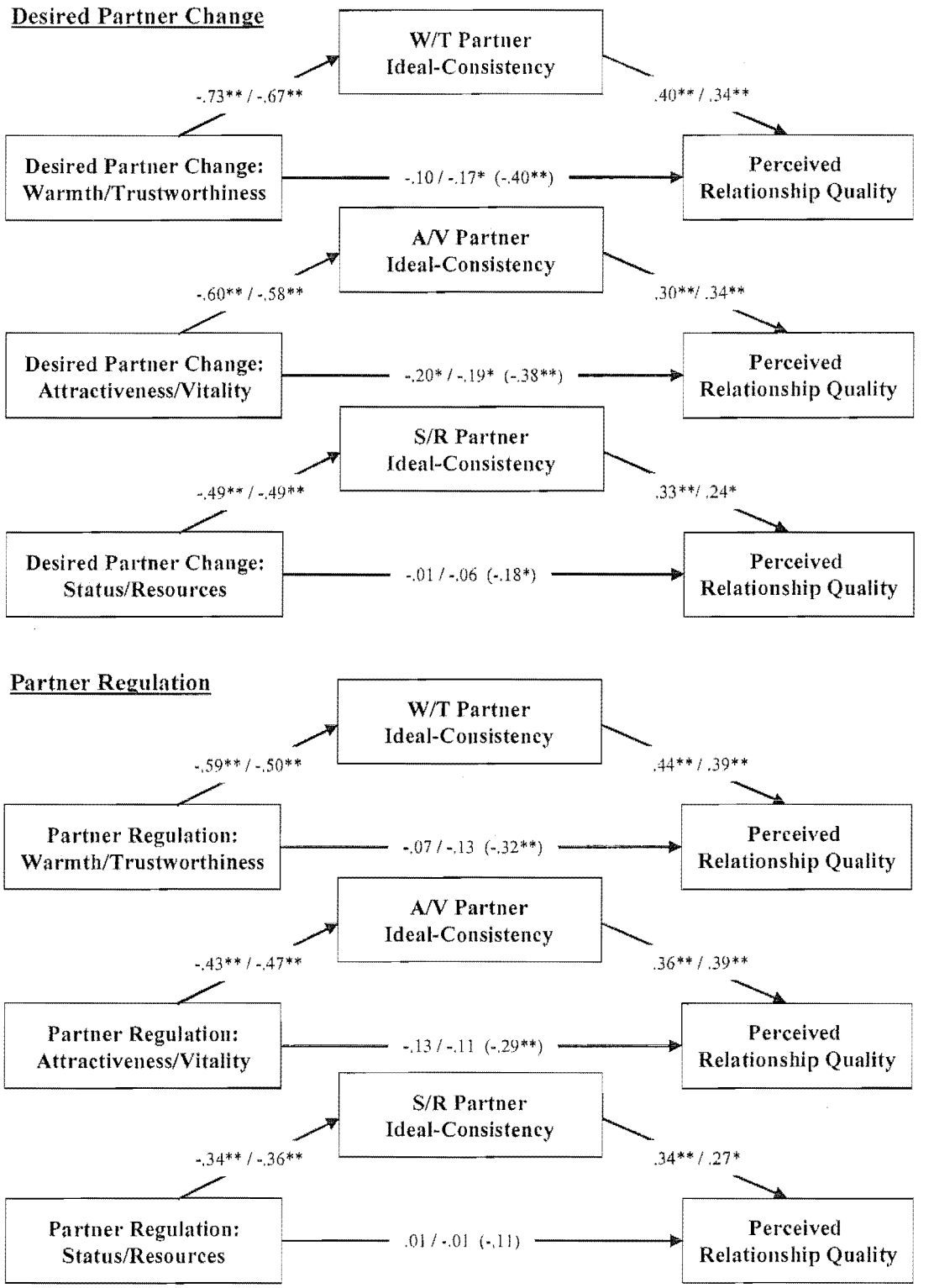

Figure 5. ***Models showing ideal-perception consistency mediating the path between desired partner change/partner regulation and perceived relationship quality***

Note. Values are standardized regression coefficients. Coefficients with ideal-perception consistency measured directly are presented first, followed by a slash, and then coefficients with the indirect measure are shown. Coefficients when partner ideal-perception consistency is not controlled are shown in parentheses. W/T = Warmth/Trustworthiness, AV = Attractiveness/Vitality, and S/R = Status/Resources. $^{*}p < .05$. $^{**}p < .01$.

Additional alternative explanations for these findings might suggest that they could be a function of overall positivity, length of relationship, or gender. Accordingly, the mediation models were recalculated, sequentially controlling for self-esteem (a proxy measure for general self positivity), relationship length, and gender. None of the direct or indirect paths changed in their levels of significance, and the size of the paths altered very little. These analyses do not, of course, rule out all third variables. However, they do suggest that these variables fail to discount or qualify these mediation models.

Self regulation, ideal-perception consistency, and relationship quality. Consistent with previous research (Campbell et al., 2001), only self ideal-perception consistency and desired self change and regulation on the warmth/trustworthiness ideal dimension predicted relationship quality. Accordingly, I tested whether self ideal-perception consistency mediated the relation between desired self change/self regulation and relationship quality on this particular ideal dimension. As shown in Figure 6, higher warmth/trustworthiness desired self change and self regulation attempts did predict lower self ideal-perception consistency, which in turn predicted lower relationship quality. The indirect effect was also significant for both desired change and actual regulation across both direct and indirect measures of ideal-perception consistency, $zs = 2.63$ and 4.15, $ps < .01$.

Again, global positivity as assessed by self-esteem could be a plausible alternative explanation for these findings[10]. However, calculating the model while controlling for self-esteem had no affect on the paths displayed in Figure 5. Analyses were also run controlling

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[10] As expected, self-esteem was correlated with both self ideal-perception consistency ($rs = .21$ to $.43$, $ps < .05$) and desired self change and self regulation attempts ($rs = -.15$ to $-.34$, $ps < .05$) across dimensions (with the exception of status/resources regulation attempts, $r = -.04$). I also examined whether self ideal-consistency mediated the relation between self regulation and self-esteem. No support was found for this model.

for relationship length and partner ideal-perception consistency. Once again, the prior mediation results remained unchanged.

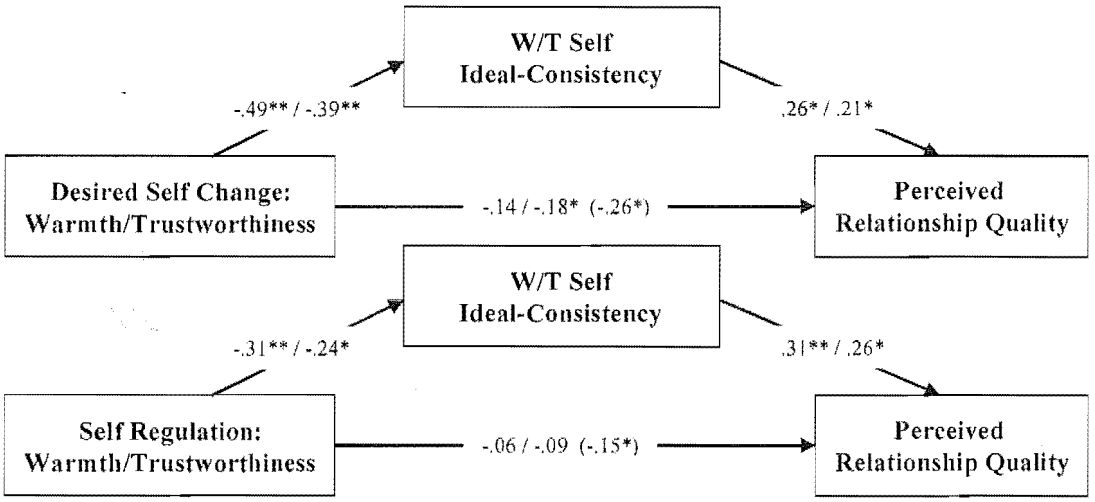

Figure 6. ***Models showing ideal-perception consistency mediating the path between desired self change/partner regulation and perceived relationship quality***

Note. Values are standardized regression coefficients. Coefficients with ideal-perception consistency measured directly are presented first, followed by a slash, and then coefficients with the indirect measure are shown. Coefficients when self ideal-perception consistency is not controlled are shown in parentheses. W/T = Warmth/Trustworthiness.

$^{*}p < .05$. $^{**}p < .01$.

Discussion

The results from Study 1 provide compelling evidence for the regulation functions proposed by the Ideal Standards Model. For all three ideal dimensions, strong connections were found between perceived consistency with ideal standards and regulation desires and behavior. As predicted, however, the nature of these links was moderated by whether the self or the partner was the cognitive focus. Self ideal-perception consistency predicted a greater focus on changing the self (but not the partner), whereas partner ideal-perception consistency predicted a stronger focus on changing the partner (but not the self). Importantly, these effects were domain-specific, such that more regulation on one ideal dimension (e.g., warmth/trustworthiness) was associated with lower ideal-perception consistency on the same

ideal dimension. In addition, these effects were not attributable to general evaluative or halo effects or how positively or negatively self and partner were viewed in a given domain.

I also tested and found provisional support for some proposed extensions to the Ideal Standards Model that were formulated in terms of two causal models (see Figure 2, Models 2 and 3). For self and partner regulation, lower perceived regulation success during the prior six months was associated with lower ideal-consistency. Beyond this main effect, however, the perceived success of warmth/trustworthiness and status/resources regulation attempts moderated the relation between regulation and ideal-consistency. More specifically, individuals who tried harder to change the self or the partner yet were unsuccessful reported the lowest ideal-perception consistency.

The final model tested proposed that ideal-perception consistency might mediate the relation between desired partner change and partner regulation and perceived relationship quality (Figure 2, Model 3). This model was strongly supported for all three ideal dimensions. Greater desire to change the partner and more fervent partner regulation attempts during the previous six months predicted lower partner ideal-perception consistency, which in turn predicted lower relationship quality. Self ideal-perception consistency also mediated the link between warmth/trustworthiness self regulation and relationship quality, and this effect was not explained by individuals' general level of self-esteem.

An unexpected set of findings indicated that more positive self (or partner) ideal-perception consistency may have motivated increased regulation of partner (or self) attributes related to that ideal dimension, and this effect was most consistent for the regulation of attractiveness/vitality. Perhaps individuals who perceive themselves as particularly vital and attractive expect correspondingly more from their partners on this particular ideal dimension (and, therefore, desire change and regulate their partners more), whereas individuals who

perceive that their partner more closely matches their own ideal standards may feel more pressure to maintain or reach a higher standard in themselves (and regulate more accordingly). These unexpected results suggest that the desire to change and regulate the self or the partner could be a function of dyadic influences that operate across partners, a possibility that is explored in Study 2.

In general, the results of Study 1 confirm the basic predictions of the Ideal Standards Model, and they also support the proposed models that posit specific relationship regulation processes. The results remained robust across two different measures of ideal-perception consistency, and did not appear to be a function of several artifactual or third variables. The results, however, were somewhat stronger for partner-related ideal-perception consistency and regulation than for variables dealing with the self. Moreover, Study 1 examined individuals rather than romantic couples, meaning that relationship-level processes that might be critical to understanding regulation processes could not be investigated. Study 2 sought to redress this limitation by investigating how regulation processes operate within relationship dyads.

Chapter Four: Study Two

In Study 2, partners involved in romantic relationships completed the same questionnaires used in Study 1. Assessing ideal-perception consistency and regulation with both members of a couple allowed us to replicate the within-partner associations found in Study 1 (e.g., the link between partner ideal-perception consistency and perceived relationship quality), and also enabled us to examine associations across partners (e.g., the link between men's partner ideal-consistency and women's perceived relationship quality). Thus, Study 2 had two major objectives: (a) to replicate the effects found in Study 1, and (b) to test for partner effects across regulation, ideal-perception consistency, and perceived relationship quality.

Replicating Study 1 findings. The predictions for actor effects (i.e., the effect that an individual's independent variable score has on his/her dependent variable score in an analysis, controlling for his/her partner's independent variable score) were the same as Study 1. Guided by the Ideal Standards Model, I first predicted that stronger regulation desires and attempts should be associated with lower ideal-perception consistency. However, I also expected that these effects would be specific to the target (self versus partner) and channeled through each ideal dimension, rather than being driven by global evaluative judgments (see Figures 1 and 2, Model 1).

Second, I predicted that regulation success should moderate the link between regulation desires and attempts, and ideal-perception consistency. Specifically, individuals who tried harder to change the self or the partner would have lower levels of ideal-perception consistency, but this pattern would be more marked for those who have been less successful in their regulation attempts (see Figure 2, Model 2).

Third, I predicted that greater partner regulation would predict lower perceived relationship quality, but that this association would be mediated by ideal-perception consistency (see Figure 2, Model 3). This prediction extends Study 1 in that, in Study 2, I was able to control for the reported regulation and ideal-perception consistency from the *partner* when calculating the within-participant paths.

Partner effects. In addition, I predicted several partner effects. A partner effect is evident when the partner's independent variable score predicts the actor's dependent variable score, controlling for the actor's independent variable score. Previous research indicates that the amount of partner ideal-perception consistency not only predicts an individual's own judgments of relationship quality, but also perceptions of relationship quality harbored by his/her partner (Campbell et al., 2001). This is not surprising given the multiple ways in which individuals can and do communicate their satisfaction or dissatisfaction regarding specific traits of their partners. I expected to replicate this partner effect.

Although no prior research has investigated partner effects with respect to regulation, desired or attempted regulation of the partner should be associated with partners' self perceptions in two independent ways. First, if Mary tries to get John to communicate more sensitively and to be more trustworthy, such attempts are likely to be noticed by John and may cause him to have doubts about his standing on the warmth/trustworthiness dimension. Second, even if John stubbornly retains his positive view of himself, he is likely to realize that he does not conform very closely to his partner's expectations on this dimension. I have called this variable *inferred ideal-perception consistency*, which is a new measure developed for this study.

I used a Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) strategy to model these partner effects. Using SEM enabled the control of extraneous variables (e.g., relationship length) and to test

the general hypotheses that such effects should be domain-specific, and not a function of global positivity or the overall desire for the partner to change.

Method

Participants

Sixty-two couples involved in heterosexual romantic relationships for a minimum of six months were recruited via poster advertisements at the University of Canterbury. Women ranged from 18 to 43 years of age (M = 23.10, SD = 4.96) and men ranged from 18 to 49 years of age (M = 23.80, SD = 5.75). Of the sample, 28 participants were living together and 10 were married. Of the remaining participants, 16 reported their relationship as serious, and 8 as steady. The mean length of the relationships was 33.90 months (SD = 33.65 months).

Scales and Psychometric Analyses

Both partners of each couple completed the same scales as in Study 1 along with an additional measure that was developed to assess the new construct of inferred ideal-perception consistency. For this new measure, participants rated each attribute from the Partner Ideal Scales (see Study 1) in terms of the extent to which they believed they matched their *partner's* ideal (1 = *I do not match my partner's ideal at all*, 7 = *I completely match my partner's ideal*). Higher scores reflect more positive perceptions that the self matches the partner's ideal standards.

As with Study 1, CFA was used to confirm the three-factor structure (representing the three ideal dimensions) of all scales. As predicted, for all 13 scales, the three-factor model produced a good fit (χ^2 (25, 62) = 20.18 to 59.57, ps = .75 to <.01, CFIs = .91 to 1.00, RMSEAs = .00 to .15) and a significantly better fit (χ^2change (2, 62) = 16.88 to 153.23, ps < .01) than the one-factor model, which consistently demonstrated poor fit (χ^2 (27, 62) = 51.30

to 194.40, *ps* <. 01, CFIs = .41 to .86, RMSEAs = .12 to .27). The items for each dimension were also internally consistent within each scale (Cronbach alphas ranged from .66 to .92, shown in Table 4). Consequently, for each measure, items within each dimension were summed and averaged to provide single indexes for each dimension. The PRQC scale was used to measure perceived relationship quality, and the Rosenberg self-esteem scale was used to assess self-esteem (see Study 1). As before, both scales had good internal reliability (see Table 4).

Procedure

The general procedures and order of questionnaires paralleled Study 1. Half of the sample completed the scales regarding the self prior to the scales regarding the partner, and half of the sample completed the scales assessing ideal standards, perceptions, and ideal-perception consistency before the scales concerning regulation.[11] Partners completed the questionnaires in separate rooms, after which they engaged in videotaped discussions (not reported here). At the conclusion of the study, each couple was debriefed, paid $40 for their participation, and entered into a $50 cash draw.

Results

Descriptive statistics. Means, standard deviations, and internal reliabilities for all scales are shown in Table 4. Similar to Study 1, a 2 (gender) x 3 (partner ideal ratings for the three dimensions) ANOVA of ideal importance, with both factors as repeated measures, revealed main effects for gender, $F(1, 61) = 5.57$, $p < .05$, and ideal dimension, $F(2, 122) = 81.98$, $p < .01$, as well as a significant interaction, $F(2, 122) = 17.73$, $p < .01$. Both men and

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[11] As in Study 1, order effects were tested. A small number of effects were significant (4 out of a total 22 possible main effects) but were not theoretically meaningful.

women rated warmth/trustworthiness attributes as most important for their ideal partner. Planned comparisons revealed only one significant gender difference; as expected, women reported higher partner ideal standards for status/resources than did men ($F(1, 61) = 10.38$, $p < .01$).

I also conducted equivalent ANOVAs across the remaining scales and found significant main effects across ideal dimensions for 7 of the 10 scales. Moreover, 9 of the 10 possible interactions revealed significant effects. Because differences across ideal dimension and sex are not the focus of this study these findings are not reported in detail. However, the effects were consistent with the results of study 1 (and previously reported sex differences in ideal standards, e.g., Fletcher et al., 2004), and, therefore, I provide a brief summary here.

For both men and women, warmth/trustworthiness was rated as most important across scales, with the exception of desired self change and self regulation for which status/resources was rated most highly (perhaps because the majority of couples consisted of at least one university student). Although post-hoc comparisons were generally nonsignificant, an examination of the means across sex indicated that men reported lower partner ideal-perception consistency on the attractiveness/vitality dimension and reported higher desire and attempts to change these attributes of their partner (compared to women), whereas women held more negative attractiveness/vitality self perceptions. Men also reported more negative self perceptions and lower self ideal-consistency on warmth/trustworthiness than women, held lower perceptions of meeting their partners' status/resources ideal standards, and also reported stronger desires to change warmth/trustworthiness and status/resources self-attributes.

Table 4

Means, Standard Deviations, and Reliability Coefficients of all Scales (Study 2)

	Females	Males	Females IR	Males IR		Females	Males	Females IR	Males IR
Partner ideal standards					**Self ideal standards**				
Warmth/Trustworthiness	6.22 (0.57)	5.97 (0.62)	.77	.76	Warmth/Trustworthiness	6.34 (0.50)	6.19 (0.59)	.74	.77
Attractiveness/Vitality	4.77 (0.94)	5.12 (0.74)	.77	.66	Attractiveness/Vitality	5.24 (1.02)	5.18 (0.93)	.87	.80
Status/Resources	4.97 (1.24)	4.23 (1.28)	.92	.88	Status/Resources	5.27 (1.17)	4.75 (1.14)	.86	.82
Partner perceptions					**Self perceptions**				
Warmth/Trustworthiness	5.70 (0.81)	5.75 (0.78)	.83	.84	Warmth/Trustworthiness	5.60 (0.80)	5.31 (0.71)	.83	.72
Attractiveness/Vitality	5.61 (0.79)	5.42 (0.86)	.67	.75	Attractiveness/Vitality	4.38 (0.99)	4.77 (0.79)	.77	.69
Status/Resources	5.36 (0.87)	5.58 (0.98)	.78	.81	Status/Resources	5.36 (0.93)	5.15 (0.89)	.82	.78
Partner ideal-perception consistency					**Self ideal-perception consistency**				
Warmth/Trustworthiness	5.79 (0.96)	5.84 (0.78)	.87	.81	Warmth/Trustworthiness	5.35 (0.94)	5.13 (0.84)	.81	.78
Attractiveness/Vitality	5.81 (0.86)	5.41 (0.83)	.73	.76	Attractiveness/Vitality	4.18 (1.12)	4.66 (0.90)	.80	.75
Status/Resources	5.77 (1.03)	5.88 (0.78)	.85	.80	Status/Resources	4.89 (1.35)	4.78 (0.96)	.90	.80
Inferred ideal-perception consistency									
Warmth/Trustworthiness	5.29 (1.04)	5.01 (0.93)	.84	.84					
Attractiveness/Vitality	4.92 (1.05)	5.11 (0.75)	.77	.68					
Status/Resources	5.34 (1.08)	4.90 (1.08)	.85	.84					
Desired partner change					**Desired self change**				
Warmth/Trustworthiness	2.87 (1.27)	2.76 (1.27)	.77	.80	Warmth/Trustworthiness	3.32 (1.33)	3.97 (1.16)	.79	.75
Attractiveness/Vitality	2.29 (1.10)	3.08 (1.20)	.74	.73	Attractiveness/Vitality	4.30 (1.29)	4.06 (1.21)	.72	.73
Status/Resources	2.99 (1.45)	2.56 (1.45)	.73	.86	Status/Resources	4.33 (1.67)	4.75 (1.35)	.82	.73
Partner regulation					**Self regulation**				
Warmth/Trustworthiness	2.49 (1.18)	2.33 (1.19)	.78	.83	Warmth/Trustworthiness	3.08 (1.35)	3.42 (1.20)	.81	.80
Attractiveness/Vitality	2.03 (1.14)	2.58 (1.17)	.80	.78	Attractiveness/Vitality	3.32 (1.09)	3.18 (1.10)	.70	.75
Status/Resources	2.56 (1.38)	2.15 (1.23)	.75	.85	Status/Resources	3.48 (1.48)	4.00 (1.30)	.77	.74

Table 4 continued	Females	Males	Females IR	Males IR		Females	Males	Females IR	Males IR
Partner regulation success[1]					**Self regulation success**[1]				
Warmth/Trustworthiness	2.80 (1.29)	2.60 (1.17)	.76	.82	Warmth/Trustworthiness	3.15 (1.28)	3.46 (1.21)	.77	.82
N	57	51			N	61	61		
Attractiveness/Vitality	2.26 (1.13)	2.68 (1.10)	.73	.76	Attractiveness/Vitality	3.13 (1.06)	3.14 (1.07)	.71	.74
N	50	55			N	60	61		
Status/Resources	2.66 (1.17)	2.71 (1.18)	.63	.73	Status/Resources	3.40 (1.29)	3.67 (1.29)	.63	.78
N	54	45			N	57	62		
Relationship quality	6.17 (0.62)	6.02 (0.66)	.82	.85					
Self-esteem	5.33 (1.02)	5.44 (0.90)	.90	.88					

Note. Standard deviations appear in parentheses. IR = internal reliability - Cronbach alphas.

[1] Descriptive data regarding regulation success include only those participants who reported actually attempting to change themselves or their partner on specific ideal dimensions. Thus, the sample sizes vary across groups for these analyses.

Measures of ideal-perception consistency. As in Study 1, ideal-perception consistency was measured in two ways: (1) a direct method, which asked participants the degree to which the self and the partner matched their ideal standards, and (2) an indirect method, which used the residuals from regressing perceptions on ideals. For all three dimensions, and for both women and men, the direct and indirect measures were strongly correlated for the self (rs = .47 to .68, ps < .01) and the partner (rs = .65 to .86, ps < .01).

Replicating the links between ideal-perception consistency and regulation. I expected to replicate the findings from Study 1, which showed that (a) lower partner ideal-perception consistency was associated with a stronger desire and more attempts to change the partner (but not the self), and (b) lower self ideal-consistency was associated with a stronger desire and more attempts to change the self (but not the partner). To test these predictions I used the EQS Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) program (Bentler, 1995). Using SEM allowed me to test both partners simultaneously, as well as to concurrently calculate the associations between ideal-perception consistency and both self and partner desired change and regulation attempts. An example of this analysis strategy is illustrated in Figure 7. If my predictions were borne out, the paths running from (women and men's) partner ideal-perception consistency to partner regulation would be negative and significant, whereas the paths running from (women and men's) self ideal-perception consistency to partner regulation would not be significant.

Equivalent analyses were run for both desired change and actual regulation across all three ideal dimensions, and were run separately for self and partner ideal-perception consistency[12].

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[12] I chose to run analyses for self and partner ideal-perception consistency separately because of the number of variables added to each model when controlling for ideal-perception consistency across dimensions as described below.

In addition, the paths were pooled across gender (e.g., constraining the path from women's partner ideal-perception consistency to partner regulation to be equal to the equivalent path for men). In general, there were no differences in the paths across gender. For the few exceptions (noted in Tables 5 and 6), the paths were left unconstrained. As in Study 1, a strong convergent and discriminant pattern emerged providing good support for predictions (see Tables 5 and 6).

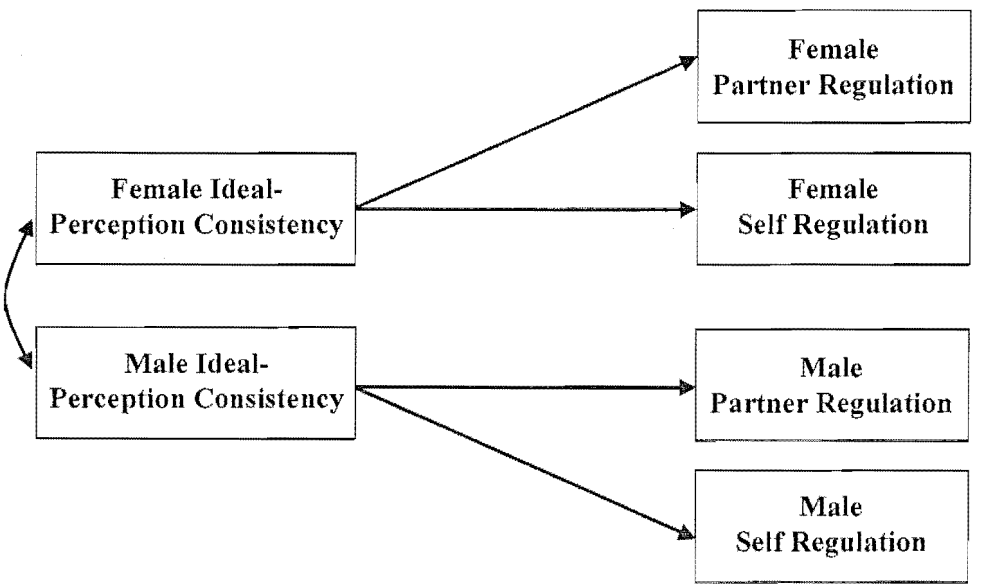

Figure 7. SEM model testing the associations between partner ideal-perception consistency and self and partner regulation

Table 5 displays the path coefficients between partner ideal-perception consistency and desired change and regulation. All 24 paths that were predicted to be negative (shown in boldface) were in fact negative and significant. For both men and women, across ideal dimensions and for both direct and indirect measures of ideal-perception consistency, individuals who perceived lower consistency between their partner perceptions and their ideal standards reported greater desire and more actual attempts to change their partner. In contrast, as predicted, there were no significant paths between partner ideal-perception consistency and

either desired self change or self regulation attempts. In addition, when I compared the coefficients, virtually all (23 out of 24 comparisons) of the paths involving partner desired change and regulation attempts were significantly more negative than were the paths involving self desired change and regulation attempts[13].

Following the strategy described in Study 1, these models were then reanalyzed partialing out ideal-perception consistency ratings for the two other ideal dimensions to control for overall partner evaluation. In addition, reports of other-directed desired change and regulation was controlled by running a path from self desired change/regulation to partner desired change/regulation when examining the links with partner regulation, and the opposite path when examining the associations with self regulation.

The path coefficients from these analyses (shown in Table 5 in parentheses) revealed the same pattern of convergent and discriminant correlations as reported above, demonstrating that partner regulation is channeled through specific mate value dimensions. In addition, consistent with the findings in Study 1, positive paths running between partner ideal-perception consistency and desired self change and self regulation, indicated that the more closely individuals perceived that their partners matched their ideal standards (particularly warmth/trustworthiness and attractiveness/vitality standards), the more they desired and attempted to alter these characteristics in themselves.

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[13] As in Study 1, these comparisons were made using dependent *r* t-tests. This is, perhaps, unorthodox given the coefficients presented in Table 5 and 6 are pooled across gender. However, equivalent comparisons across the zero-order correlations (i.e., when not constrained across gender) produced virtually identical results.

Table 5 *SEM Coefficients for Paths from Partner Ideal-perception Consistency to Desired Change and Regulation Attempts of Self and Partner (Study 2)*

	Desired Change			Regulation Attempts		
	Self	Partner	t	Self	Partner	t
Females						
Ideal-perception consistency (Direct)						
Warmth/Trustworthiness	-.11 (.31*)	**-.63*** **(-.60*)**	8.07*	-.03 (.26*)	**-.46*** **(-.50*)**	4.48*
Attractiveness/Vitality	.09 (.27*)	**-.61*** **(-.65*)**	6.75*	*-.14* (.32*)	**-.52*** **(-.55*)**	3.64*
Status/Resources	-.05 (.17)	**-.44*** **(-.42*)**	2.82*	*-.24* (.16)	**-.30*** **(-.26*)**	0.48
Ideal-perception consistency (Indirect)						
Warmth/Trustworthiness	-.09 (.23*)	**-.55*** **(-.49*)**	5.48*	.00 (.22*)	**-.37*** **(-.40*)**	3.45*
Attractiveness/Vitality	.05 (.19)	**-.56*** **(-.54*)**	5.18*	-.03 (.19)	**-.44*** **(-.46*)**	3.50*
Status/Resources	.05 (.14)	**-.40*** **(-.35*)**	3.13*	.05 (.11)	**-.32*** **(-.29*)**	2.90*
Males						
Ideal-perception consistency (Direct)						
Warmth/Trustworthiness	-.10 (.22)	**-.54*** **(-.51*)**	4.51*	-.03 (.24*)	**-.49*** **(-.43*)**	4.49*
Attractiveness/Vitality	.09 (.29*)	**-.54*** **(-.56*)**	4.95*	*.21* (.33*)	**-.48*** **(-.52*)**	6.06*
Status/Resources	-.05 (.16)	**-.33*** **(-.32*)**	2.28*	*.15* (.14)	**-.23*** **(-.23*)**	2.97*
Ideal-perception consistency (Indirect)						
Warmth/Trustworthiness	-.10 (.26*)	**-.59*** **(-.53*)**	5.67*	-.06 (.25*)	**-.50*** **(-.42*)**	4.34*
Attractiveness/Vitality	.05 (.20)	**-.52*** **(-.52*)**	4.31*	.06 (.19)	**-.49*** **(-.47*)**	3.69*
Status/Resources	-.06 (.18)	**-.42*** **(-.38*)**	3.18*	.01 (.14)	**-.39*** **(-.35*)**	3.41*

Note. *t* statistics are dependent *r* comparisons between coefficients for self and partner desired change and regulation; $df = 59$ (see Footnote 13). Coefficients in boldface are those predicted to be negative. Coefficients in parentheses for desired self change and self regulation attempts control for partner ideal-perception consistency across the two other ideal dimensions and for partner desired change/regulation attempts on that dimension. Coefficients in parentheses for desired partner change and partner regulation attempts control for partner ideal-perception consistency across the two other ideal dimensions and for self desired change/regulation attempts on that dimension. All paths were pooled across gender (except for those shown in italics). There were generally no differences in the paths across gender (LM χ^2 (1, 62) = 0.01 to 3.25 = .95 to .07, with two exceptions (marked in italics); the paths between partner ideal-perception consistency (direct measure) and self regulation on the attractiveness/vitality and status/resources dimensions were significantly different across gender (LM χ^2 (1, 62) = 3.89 and 4.54, $ps < .05$, respectively). However, when controlling for desired partner change and partner regulation these differences disappeared (LM χ^2 (1, 62) = 3.25 and 1.67, $ps > .05$).

*$p < .05$.

Table 6 *SEM Coefficients for Paths from Self Ideal-perception Consistency to Desired Change and Regulation Attempts of Self and Partner (Study 2)*

	Desired Change			Regulation Attempts		
	Self	Partner	t	Self	Partner	t
Females						
Ideal-perception consistency (Direct)						
Warmth/Trustworthiness	**-.21*** **(-.11)**	-.19* (-.05)	0.17	**-.05** **(-.04)**	-.13 (-.09)	0.65
Attractiveness/Vitality	**-.43*** **(-.47*)**	-.02 (.06)	2.89*	**-.23*** **(-.33*)**	.00 (.20)	1.67*
Status/Resources	***-.52**** ***(-.53*)***	-.16 (-.06)	2.95*	***-.36**** ***(-.31*)***	-.08 (-.02)	2.25*
Ideal-perception consistency (Indirect)						
Warmth/Trustworthiness	**-.27*** **(-.22*)**	-.19* (-.03)	0.69	**-.11** **(-.05)**	-.15 (-.15)	0.33
Attractiveness/Vitality	**-.26*** **(-.39*)**	.19* (.39*)	2.88*	**-.07** **(-.25*)**	.18* (.34*)	1.77*
Status/Resources	**-.05** **(-.03)**	.03 (.04)	0.48	**.09** **(.09)**	.07 (.01)	0.14
Males						
Ideal-perception consistency (Direct)						
Warmth/Trustworthiness	**-.21*** **(-.12)**	-.17* (-.04)	0.30	**.05** **(-.04)**	-.11 (-.08)	1.18
Attractiveness/Vitality	**-.36*** **(-.41*)**	-.02 (.04)	2.18*	**-.18*** **(-.27*)**	.00 (.24*)	1.18
Status/Resources	***-.10*** ***(-.02)***	-.12 (-.04)	0.15	***-.11*** ***(.18)***	-.07 (-.02)	0.29
Ideal-perception consistency (Indirect)						
Warmth/Trustworthiness	**-.31*** **(-.26*)**	-.19* (-.03)	0.96	**-.12** **(-.06)**	-.24 (-.15)	0.93
Attractiveness/Vitality	**-.27*** **(-.41*)**	.18* (.38*)	2.78*	**-.07** **(-.24*)**	.25* (.34*)	2.16*
Status/Resources	**.06** **(-.04)**	.03 (.04)	0.22	**.11** **(.11)**	.08 (.01)	0.22

Note. *t* statistics are dependent *r* comparisons between coefficients for self and partner desired change and regulation; $df = 59$ (see Footnote 13). Coefficients in boldface are those predicted to be negative. Coefficients in parentheses for desired self change and self regulation attempts control for self ideal-perception consistency across ideal dimensions and partner desired change/regulation attempts on that dimension. Coefficients in parentheses for desired partner change and partner regulation attempts control for self ideal-perception consistency across the two other ideal dimensions and for self desired change/regulation attempts on that dimension. All paths were pooled across gender (except for those shown in italics). There were generally no differences in the paths across gender (LM χ^2 (1, 62) = 0.00 to 2.39 = .99 to .12, with two exceptions (marked in italics); only females' status/resources self ideal-perception consistency (direct measure) was significantly associated with desired self change and self regulation (LM χ^2 (1, 62) = 4.78 and 5.89, $ps < .05$, respectively). These paths were left unconstrained.

*$p < .05$.

Table 6 displays the path coefficients between self ideal-perception consistency and desired change and regulation. The pattern of results provided weaker evidence for the predictions and differed to some extent across the direct and the indirect measures of ideal-perception consistency. Of the 24 paths that were predicted to be negative (shown in boldface), 12 were indeed significantly negative. However, only 4 of the paths that were *not* predicted to be negative (between self ideal-consistency and partner regulation) were actually significant. Comparisons between the pairs of coefficients revealed that in 9 of the 24 comparisons, self ideal-perception consistency was significantly more negatively related to self desired change and regulation than partner desired change and regulation.

Thus, if participants perceived that they did not match their self warmth/trustworthiness and attractiveness/vitality ideal standards, they more strongly desired and (for attractiveness/vitality) tried to change these attributes in the self (but not the partner). Recalculating the paths while partialing out possible artifactual variables (described previously), did not, in general, alter the pattern of findings (see Table 6; path coefficients of models analyzed with the additional controls shown in parentheses). As in Study 1, however, some positive associations between self ideal-perception consistency and partner regulation emerged, suggesting that individuals who had modest self perceptions of mate value in terms of attractiveness/vitality expected less from their partners. Accordingly, they expressed less desire to change their partners' attractiveness/vitality attributes. Coupled with the positive associations found between partner ideal-perception consistency and self regulation reported above, these results suggest that partners may influence one another as a result of both their perceptions and their regulation attempts, a possibility which I turn to in the next section.

Finally, as in Study 1, I wanted to eliminate the possibility that the associations across ideal-perception consistency and regulation were produced by self and partner perceptions

(rather than the inconsistency between perceptions and ideal standards). Accordingly, I ran a series of SEM analyses which included paths from regulation to both perceptions and ideal-perception consistency (again pooled across gender). For both men and women, partner ideal-perception consistency remained a significant predictor of partner regulation desires and attempts across ideal dimensions (βs = -.34 to -.49, $p < .05$) with the exception of status/resources partner regulation attempts (βs = -.18 and -.23, $p > .05$ for men and women respectively). In contrast, partner perceptions did not significantly predict desired change or regulation when partner ideal-perception consistency was controlled (βs = -.12 to .30, $p > .05$) except for men's warmth/trustworthiness desired partner change and partner regulation (βs = -.47 and -.39, $p < .05$ for desired change and regulation respectively). For self ideal-perception consistency, all of the significant paths running from ideal-consistency to regulation reported in Table 6 remained significant when controlling for self perceptions (βs = -.26 to -.51, $p > .05$), whereas none of the 12 paths running from self perceptions to self regulation were significantly negative when controlling for self ideal-consistency (for detailed results see Table B2, Appendix 2). These results provide further evidence that the discrepancy between perceptions and ideal standards motivates desired change and regulation attempts rather then perceptions of the self or the partner per se.

Testing partner effects: Links between ideal-perception consistency and partners' reported regulation. I also used SEM to examine the associations between partner regulation and partners' self perceptions. The analysis strategy is shown in Figure 8. If partner regulation is related to partners' perceptions of self as I predict, the cross-paths (paths a and b) should be negative and significant.

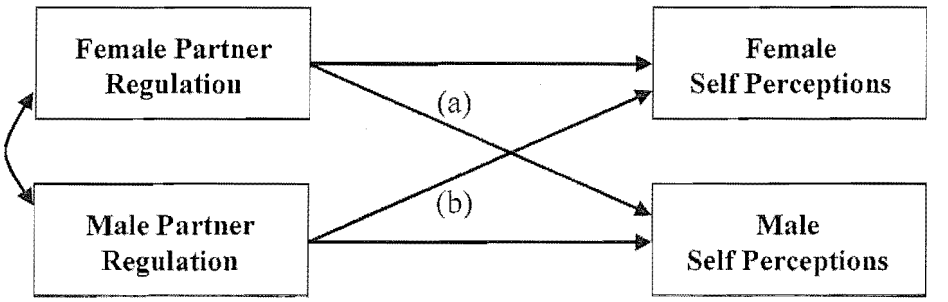

Figure 8. ***SEM model testing the associations between partner regulation and partners' self perceptions***

Equivalent analyses were run for both desired partner change and actual partner regulation. To control for overall positive evaluation, self perceptions on the other two ideal dimensions were partialed out in all analyses. In addition, the cross paths were pooled across gender (e.g., constraining the path from women's partner regulation to men's self perceptions to be equal to the equivalent path for men). For the warmth/trustworthiness and attractiveness/vitality dimensions, there were no differences in the paths across gender (LM χ^2 (1, 62) = 0.06 to 0.64, *ps* = .81 to .42). However, the cross paths in the status/resources model were significantly different across gender for both desired partner change and partner regulation (LM χ^2 (1, 62) = 3.38 and 4.60, *ps* = .07 and .03). Therefore, they were left unconstrained.

The cross path coefficients (paths a and b; see Figure 8) for all three ideal dimensions are presented in the top half of Table 7. As predicted, for both women and men, the more individuals desired and attempted to change the warmth/trustworthiness of their partner, the more negative were their partners' self perceptions on this dimension. However, none of the cross-partner paths for either attractiveness/vitality or status/resources were significant.

Table 7

SEM Coefficients for Paths from Partner Regulation to Partners' Self Perceptions and Inferred Ideal-perception Consistency (Study 2)

	Desired Partner Change		Partner Regulation Attempts	
	Females (path a)	Males (path b)	Females (path a)	Males (path b)
Self perceptions				
Warmth/Trustworthiness	-.27*	-.24*	-.20*	-.18*
Attractiveness/Vitality	-.03	-.03	.03	.03
Status/Resources	.20	-.12	.19	-.19
Inferred ideal-perception consistency				
Warmth/Trustworthiness	-.02	-.01	-.02	-.02
Attractiveness/Vitality	-.31*	-.24*	-.21*	-.15*
Status/Resources	-.14*	-.12*	-.10	-.09

Note. Coefficients represent the association between desired partner change and partner regulation (e.g., women's partner regulation) and partners' self perceptions or inferred ideal-consistency (e.g., men's self perceptions). The path coefficients for self perceptions control for self perceptions across the two other ideal dimensions. The path coefficients for inferred ideal-perception consistency control for inferred ideal-consistency across the two other ideal dimensions as well as self perceptions on the corresponding dimension. Paths a and b refer to Figure 8.

*$p < .05$.

Next, the associations between partner regulation and partners' inferred ideal-perception consistency were examined (i.e., the extent to which the self matched ideal standards of the partner). Again, these analyses controlled for inferred ideal-consistency across ideal dimensions to rule out the effects of global evaluation. In addition, because judgments regarding how the self is perceived by the partner could be influenced by self perceptions (e.g., Murray, Holmes, Griffin, Bellavia, & Rose, 2001), I also controlled for self perceptions on the corresponding ideal dimensions. As before, the cross paths were pooled across gender, and Lagrange Multiplier tests revealed no gender differences for any of the cross paths (LM χ^2 (1, 62) = 0.01 to 1.57, *p*s = .91 to .21).

The results were a mirror image of those found when predicting self perceptions (see the bottom half of Table 7). Unlike self perceptions, partner regulation had no effect on

partners' warmth/trustworthiness inferred ideal-consistency. However, for both attractiveness/vitality and status/resources, greater partner regulation was generally associated with reduced levels of inferred ideal-perception consistency.

Thus, I found evidence for partner effects (as predicted), and controlling for possible confounding variables, such as self-esteem or the targets' own self regulation, did *not* reduce the cross-path coefficients shown in Table 7. However, the exact pattern of findings was unexpected. I discuss possible explanations later in the chapter.

Although I did not predict any other partner effects, I also examined the associations between both self and partner regulation and partners' self and partner ideal-perception consistency. A very small number of significant effects emerged (at chance levels) and were not consistent across sex or measures of ideal-consistency.

Does perceived regulation success moderate the link between regulation and ideal-perception consistency? The same hierarchical regression analyses carried out in Study 1 were repeated to test the hypothesis that perceived success should moderate the association between regulation and ideal-perception consistency. These analyses were run separately for (a) each ideal dimension and (b) for men and women, with ideal-perception consistency (both direct and indirect measures) as the dependent variable (12 analyses in total). Only data from those individuals who actually attempted at least some regulation within specific ideal dimensions were included in each analysis. Table 8 displays the standardized regression coefficients for each ideal dimension.

Table 8

Standardized Regression Coefficients for all Dimensions Testing Whether Regulation Success Moderated the Links between Regulation Attempts and Ideal-perception Consistency (Study 2)

	Perceived Ideal-Perception Consistency (Partner or Self)					
	Female			Male		
	N	β	Semi-partial r^2	N	B	Semi-partial r^2
Partner-regulation						
Warmth/Trustworthiness	57			51		
Partner regulation		-.86** / -.84**	.31/.30		-.56* / -.82**	.12/.26
Regulation success		.53** / .59**	.12/.14		.25 / .47*	.02/.08
Interaction		1.31** / 1.33**	.09/.09		.59 / 1.39[a]	.01/.05
Attractiveness/Vitality	50			55		
Partner regulation		-.73** / -.74**	.15/.15		-.75** / -.77**	.23/.25
Regulation success		.20 / .34	.01/.03		.49* / .45*	.10/.08
Interaction		-1.55* / -1.40[a]	.06/.04		.53 / .32	.01/.00
Status/Resources	54			45		
Partner regulation		-.16 / -.35	.01/.04		-.46[a] / -.75**	.07/.17
Regulation success		-.08 / .14	.00/.01		.37 / .41[a]	.04/.05
Interaction		.58 / .14	.01/.00		.41 / .99	.01/.03
Self-regulation						
Warmth/Trustworthiness	61			61		
Self regulation		-.14 / -.19	.00/.01		-.52* / -.64**	.08/.13
Regulation success		.16 / .18	.01/.01		.57* / .62**	.10/.12
Interaction		.74 / .19	.02/.00		.72 / -.59	.03/.01
Attractiveness/Vitality	60			61		
Self regulation		-.37[a] / -.58**	.05/.13		-.61** / -.29	.14/.03
Regulation success		.35[a] / .58**	.05/.13		.44* / .30	.07/.03
Interaction		-.28 / .75	.00/.01		.99 / .72	.03/.01
Status/Resources	57			62		
Self regulation		-.51* / -.08	.07/.00		-.04 / .14	.00/.01
Regulation success		.36 / .34	.03/.03		.18 / .07	.01/.00
Interaction		.63 / .67	.01/.01		1.81** / 1.05	.11/.04

Note. These analyses only include participants who reported regulation attempts for the specific ideal dimension. Main effects have been calculated without the interaction. The dependent variable consisted of partner ideal-perception consistency when the independent variables were partner focused (top half of table) and self ideal-perception consistency when the independent variables were self focused (bottom half of table). Standardized regression coefficients and squared semi-partial correlations are shown for the direct ideal-perception consistency dependent measures first, then the coefficients for the indirect ideal-consistency dependent measure are shown.

[a]$p < .10$. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Dealing first with partner regulation and ideal-perception consistency (see top half of Table 8), the main effects for partner regulation and perceived regulation success were not as strong or as consistent as in Study 1. However, as expected, they generally revealed that the more individuals tried to change their partners, the less they perceived their partners as meeting their ideal standards. Furthermore, less successful regulation attempts predicted lower ratings of partner ideal-perception consistency. The pivotal interactions between partner regulation and perceived regulation success were significant for women on the warmth/trustworthiness and attractiveness/vitality ideal dimensions.

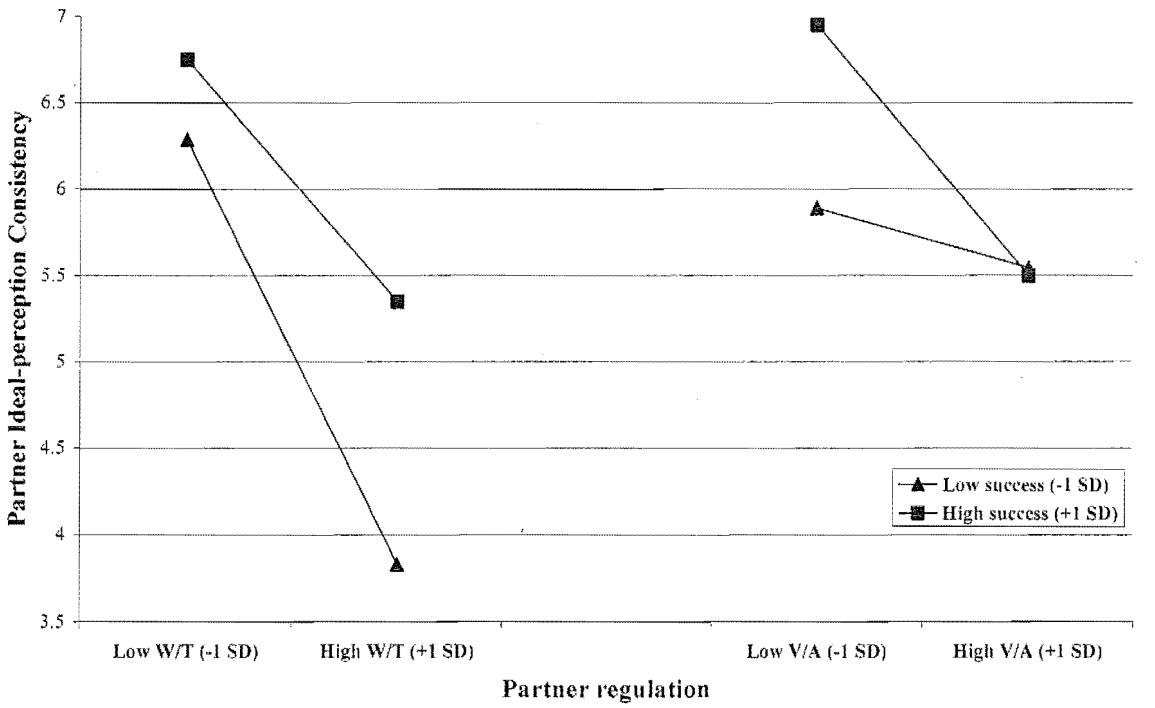

Figure 9. Interaction of women's partner regulation and regulation success on the warmth/trustworthiness and attractiveness/vitality ideal dimensions

Note. W/T = Warmth/Trustworthiness and A/V = Attractiveness/Vitality. Low scores are 1 SD below the mean; high scores are 1 SD above the mean.

These significant interactions were consistent across the two types of ideal-consistency measures (direct and indirect), and the patterns of the interactions were more or less as predicted (see Figure 9). In both cases, higher partner regulation attempts were

associated with lower ideal-perception consistency. For warmth/trustworthiness, ideal-perception consistency was reduced further for women whose regulation efforts were viewed as unsuccessful. However, for attractiveness/vitality, regulation success increased the ideal-perception consistency of women who reported fewer regulation attempts.

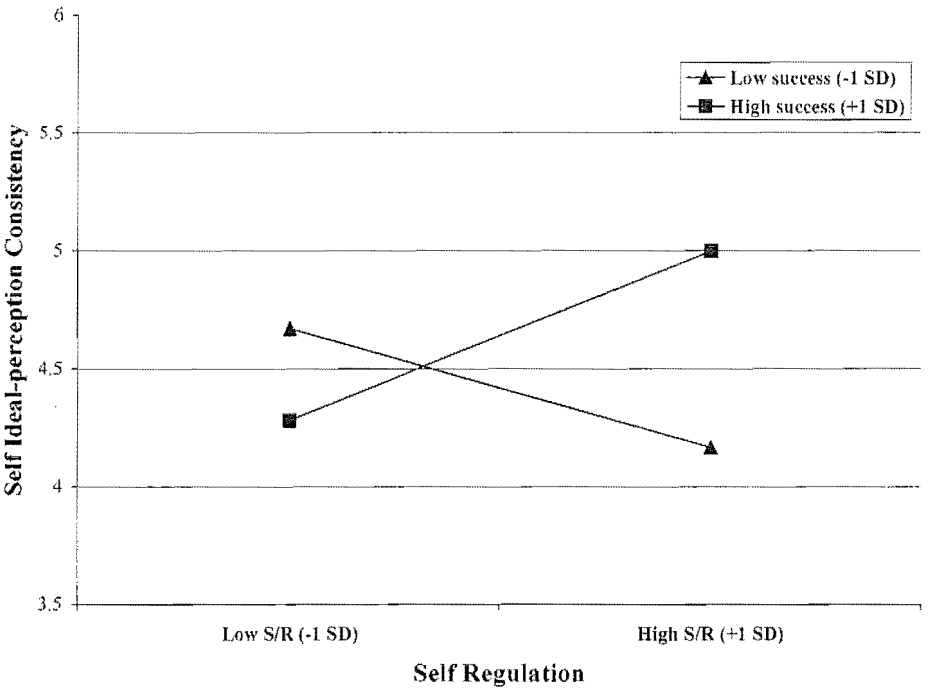

Figure 10. Interaction of men's self regulation and regulation success on the status/ resources ideal dimension

Note. S/R = Status/Resources. Low scores are 1 SD below the mean; high scores are 1 SD above the mean.

Self regulation and regulation success. The results for self regulation and regulation success on ideal-perception consistency provided weaker support for predictions (see bottom half of Table 8). However, as expected, the scattered significant main effects indicated that greater regulation and less perceived success were related to lower consistency between ideal standards and perceptions of reality. The only significant interaction between self regulation and perceived regulation success was found in men for status/resources (as measured by direct ideal-perception consistency only). This interaction is illustrated in Figure 10. Consistent with the previous interactions, greater attempts to change status/resources self-

attributes, combined with a perception that these attempts were unsuccessful, was associated with the lowest ratings of self ideal-perception consistency. In contrast, more effortful regulation attempts that were perceived as successful predicted greater perception of self ideal-consistency.

Does ideal-perception consistency mediate the link between partner regulation and relationship quality? To test for mediation (see Model 3), I again employed SEM to test the model for both relationship partners simultaneously (see Figures 11 and 12). Two cross-partner paths were entered into the equation; female ideal-perception consistency to male relationship quality, and male ideal-perception consistency to female relationship quality. (No other cross-partner paths were significant, so they were not included in the model.) I also pooled all paths across gender (e.g., constraining the path from women's partner regulation to women's ideal-consistency to be equal to the equivalent path for men). Lagrange Multiplier tests revealed that the paths in the model were not significantly different across gender (LM χ^2 (1, 62) = 0.02 to 1.35, *ps* = .88 to .25). The one exception was the cross-partner paths between women's status/resources partner ideal-perception consistency (measured directly) and men's relationship quality for both desired partner change and partner regulation (LM χ^2 (1, 62) = 5.36 and 5.39, *ps* = .02). Thus, the associated paths were left unconstrained in the status/resources models using the direct ideal-perception consistency measure.

The results for the mediation model are depicted in Figure 11 for desired partner change and in Figure 12 for actual partner regulation. For both desired partner change and partner regulation measured directly and indirectly, the model produced an excellent fit across all three ideal dimensions, χ^2 (9, 62) = 3.34 to 14.40, *ps* = .95 to .11, CFIs = .91 to 1.00, RMSEAs = .00 to .10. For both men and women, a greater desire to change the partner and more effortful attempts to regulate the partner in the past six months predicted lower

levels of partner ideal-perception consistency, which in turn predicted more negative perceptions of relationship quality. Moreover, the indirect effect for all 12 models (three ideal dimensions for both desired partner change and partner regulation with direct and indirect ideal-consistency measures) was significant; zs = 2.78 to 5.12, ps < .01. These latter results indicate that the direct paths are significantly reduced when the mediating variable is controlled.

In addition, consistent with prior research (Campbell et al., 2001), higher levels of women's ideal-perception consistency was positively related with men's relationship quality and vice versa (with one exception, noted above). Men's perceptions of their relationship quality, in other words, were not solely a product of their own perceptions of partner ideal-consistency, but were also a product of the partner ideal-consistency judgments of their female partners. To control for alternative explanations, all of the mediation models presented above were recalculated controlling for relationship length and self-esteem (a proxy measure for general self positivity). None of the direct or indirect paths changed in terms of their levels of significance, and the size of the paths changed very little.

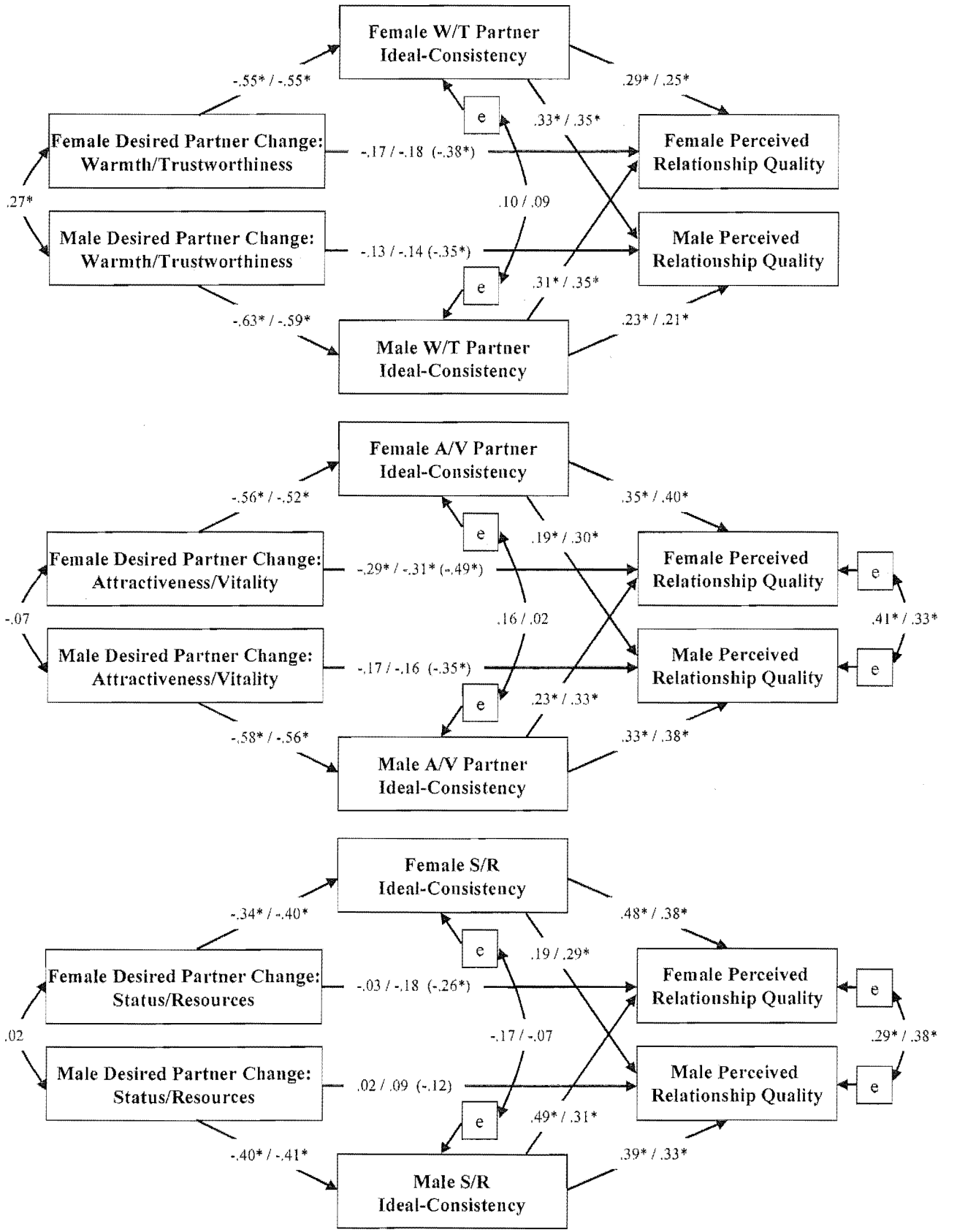

Figure 11. Models showing ideal-perception consistency mediating the path between desired partner change and perceived relationship quality.

Note. Values are standardized regression coefficients. Coefficients with ideal-perception consistency measured directly are presented first, followed by a slash, and then coefficients with the indirect measure are shown. Coefficients when partner ideal-perception consistency is not controlled are shown in parentheses. "e" represents the error term for each variable. *$p < .05$.

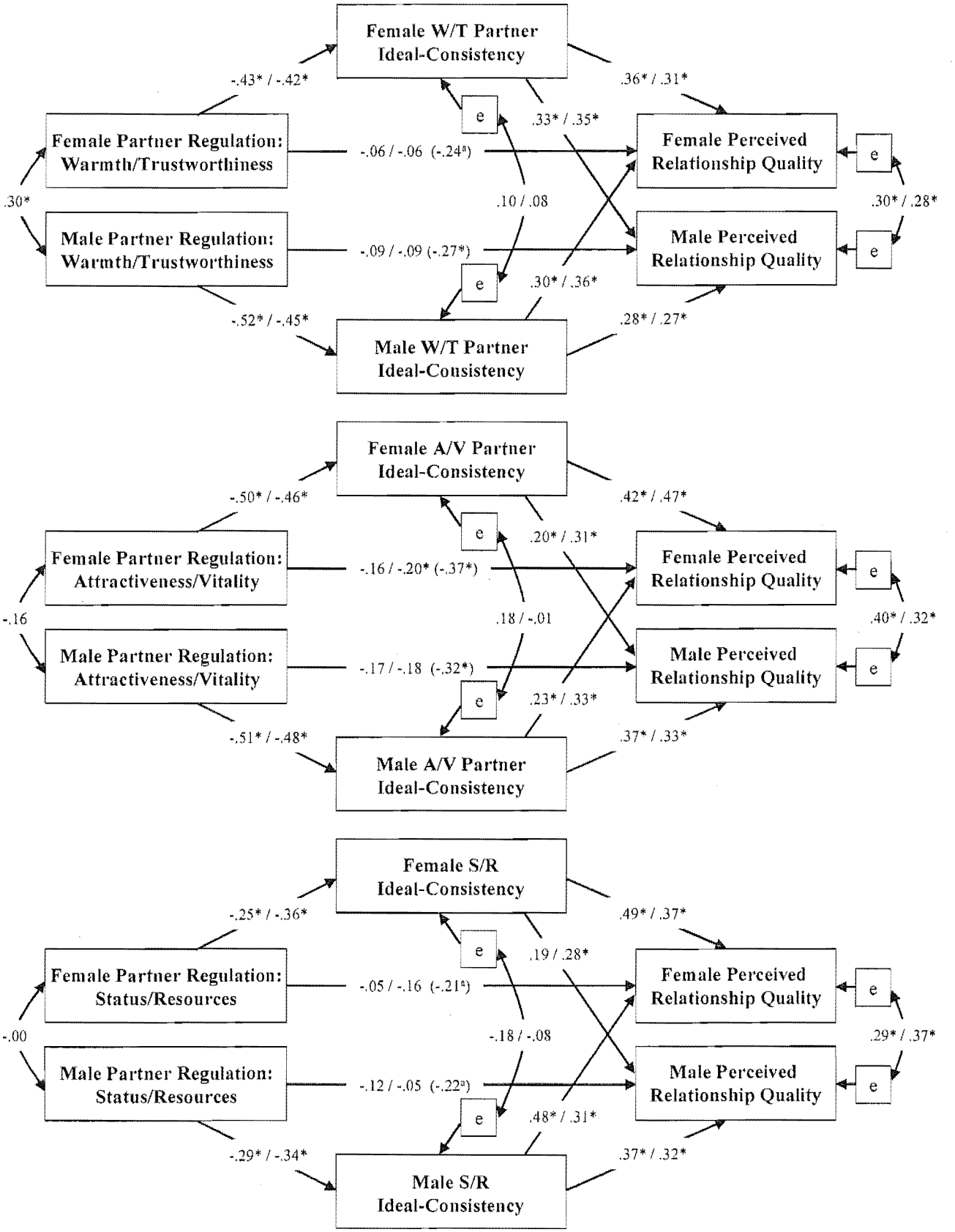

Figure 12. Models showing ideal-perception consistency mediating the path between partner regulation and perceived relationship quality.

Note. Values are standardized regression coefficients. Coefficients with ideal-perception consistency measured directly are presented first, followed by a slash, and then coefficients with the indirect measure are shown. Coefficients when partner ideal-perception consistency is not controlled are shown in parentheses. "e" represents the error term for each variable. $^{a}p < .05$. $^{*}p < .05$.

Self regulation, ideal-perception consistency, and relationship quality. As in Study 1, I also examined relations between self regulation, self ideal-perception consistency, and relationship quality. The only significant correlations that emerged were for women in two categories (warmth/trustworthiness and status/resources), and then only for associations between higher self ideal-perception consistency and more positive perceived relationship quality (rs = .26 to .43, ps < .05). For both women and men, there were no significant correlations between desired change and regulation of the self and relationship evaluation (rs = .05 to -.17). Thus, no mediation models could be tested.[14]

Discussion

The results of Study 2 replicated the central findings of Study 1, particularly with regard to partner regulation. For all three mate ideal dimensions and for both men and women, greater desires and more strenuous attempts to change the partner were consistently associated with lower partner ideal-perception consistency, yet the same regulation variables were not related to judgments of self ideal-consistency. Although less consistent across ideal dimensions and gender, greater desire and more efforts to change the self were related to lower self ideal-perception consistency but, as predicted, were not related to partner ideal-consistency ratings. In addition, all of these findings were specific to particular ideal dimensions and were not a function of either global evaluations or perceptions of self and partner within specific domains.

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[14] For both men and women, self-esteem was correlated with self ideal-perception consistency for attractiveness/vitality and status/resources (rs = .41 to .47, ps < .01) and desired change and regulation attempts of the self across dimensions (rs = -.24 to -.45, ps < .05) (with the exception of warmth/trustworthiness regulation attempts for men). I also examined whether self ideal-consistency mediated the relation between self regulation and self-esteem. Unlike Study 1, self ideal-consistency mediated the link between attractiveness/vitality and (for women only) status/resources regulation and self-esteem.

The results of Study 2 also provided further support for the models shown in Figure 2 (Models 2 and 3). Although the power to find interaction effects was fairly low in this study because of relatively small sample sizes, I still found evidence that less successful regulation attempts reduced the consistency between ideal standards and partner perceptions (and vice versa). Moreover, the mediation model (Model 3) received support across all three ideal dimensions, with stronger desired partner change and regulation attempts during the previous six months predicting lower partner ideal-perception consistency, which in turn predicted lower perceived relationship quality.

One novel objective of Study 2 was to determine how regulation, ideal-perception consistency, and relationship satisfaction were related across relationship partners. As predicted, relationship quality was not only a function of how people view their partners, but also of how their partners view them. Moreover, more regulation received from the partner was related to more negative self perceptions, but only for warmth/trustworthiness attributes. In contrast, more regulation from the partner was negatively related to perceptions of how closely individuals believed they matched their partners' standards, but only on the other two ideal dimensions of attractiveness/vitality and status/resources.

How can this specific pattern of findings be explained? Given the critical importance of warmth/trustworthiness characteristics in close relationships, and the deeply interpersonal quality of these attributes, it is not surprising that desired partner change and partner regulation exerted a direct effect on targets' salient self perceptions. Attractiveness/vitality and status/resources attributes, on the other hand, tend to be more objective. Accordingly, self perceptions on these dimensions may be less vulnerable to partners' expectations and regulation attempts. The results, however, also suggest that individuals are not ignoring the information about the regulation desires and attempts of their partners given that they appear

to be aware of what their partners are thinking. Collectively, these findings suggest that individuals are cognitively attuned to the regulation desires and attempts of their partners, and appropriately adjust their perceptions of both the self and the partner.

Consistent with these partner effects, the within-subject associations suggest that self and partner regulation may rely not only on how a specific target matches the perceiver's ideal standards, but also the extent to which *both* couple members possess the attribute(s) under evaluation. In both studies, the more closely individuals perceived their partner as matching their own warmth/trustworthiness and attractiveness/vitality ideal standards the more they desired and attempted to change the same characteristics in themselves. Similarly, the more closely individuals matched their own attractiveness/vitality ideal standards the more individuals desired and attempted to change these attributes in their partners. Thus, both the desire for change and the production of associated regulation behaviors appear to be sensitive to the relative perceived standing of both the self and the partner on relevant dimensions.

A major limitation of both Study 1 and Study 2 is that they used cross-sectional designs. A key prediction of the extended Ideal Standards Model is that regulation is principally motivated by high discrepancies (or low consistencies) between ideal standards and actual perceptions, a prediction that Studies 1 and 2 could not test. In addition, although the results in the prior studies supported the hypothesized links between regulation, ideal-perception consistency and relationship quality, we were unable to examine the possibility of the reverse mediation chain (i.e., regulation mediating the association between ideal-consistency and regulation). Study 3 was designed to remedy these limitations by investigating how ideal-perception consistency and regulation desires and attempts influence each other and judgments of relationship quality over time.

Chapter Five: Study Three

In Study 3, couples who had participated in Study 2 reported on their (a) partner ideal-perception consistency, (b) desired partner change and regulation, and (c) perceived relationship quality in a 6-month follow-up telephone interview. Assessing both ideal-perception consistency and regulation desires and attempts on two separate occasions permitted a cross-lagged design, which allowed a test of the extent to which ideal-consistency and regulation might influence each other across time. In the previous studies, I provided evidence that desired change and regulation attempts during the past six months appear to influence current perceptions of ideal-consistency. I expected to replicate the same finding examining these variables over time. Another crucial component of the extended Ideal Standards Model, however, is the proposition that ideal-perception consistency should motivate both the desire to change and actual regulation attempts (see Figure 2, Model 1). Accordingly, I had two main predictions. First, lower partner ideal-perception consistency at time 1 should predict greater desired partner change and more partner regulation attempts at time 2. Second, greater desired partner change and more partner regulation attempts at time 1 should predict lower partner ideal-perception consistency at time 2.

Finally, I also examined how both ideal-perception consistency and regulation impact on later judgments of relationship quality. I expected that reductions in ideal-perception consistency would predict a decrease in perceived relationship quality. However, consistent with the mediation model supported in the previous studies (see Figure 2, Model 3), I did not expect direct links between changes in regulation and relationship quality. This finding would support the contention that the primary outcome of regulation is reducing or increasing the consistency between perceptions and ideal standards, which in turn influences judgments of relationship quality.

Method

Participants

Fifty-one of the 62 couples who participated in Study 2 reported on their ideal-perception consistency, regulation and relationship quality six months after their initial testing session. Of those who did not participate, nine couples had broken up and two simply chose not to participate.

6-month telephone follow-up

To develop a more efficient and practical questionnaire for the telephone interview, all participants completed a short version of the partner ideal-perception consistency scale and the partner regulation questionnaire used in the prior studies. Two items from each of the mate ideal dimensions were included for each measure. The items were "understanding" and "supportive" for the warmth/trustworthiness dimension, "attractive appearance" and "good lover" for the attractiveness/vitality dimension, and "successful" and "financially secure" for the status/resources dimension. Participants rated each item on 7-point scales. For the partner ideal-perception consistency scales, participants rated each attribute in terms of the extent to which their partner matched their ideal (1 = *does not match my ideal at all*, 7 = *completely matches my ideal*). For the partner regulation questionnaires, participants rated the extent to which they (a) had desired change in that aspect of their partner during the past six months (1 = *no desire to change*, 7 = *strong desire to change*), and (b) actually tried in some way to change that aspect of their partner during the past six months (1 = *not tried at all to change*, 7 = *tried hard to change*).

Table 9

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations of Partner Ideal-perception Consistency and Partner Regulation (Short) Scales at Time 1 and 2 (Study 3)

	Time 1				Time 2				*r* across time 1 and 2	
	Females	**Males**	**Females *r***	**Males *r***	**Females**	**Males**	**Females *r***	**Males *r***	**Females *r***	**Males *r***
Partner ideal-perception consistency										
Warmth/Trustworthiness	6.09 (1.07)	6.14 (0.83)	.64	.62	5.83 (0.80)	5.86 (0.86)	.40	.58	.66	.51
Attractiveness/Vitality	6.14 (0.81)	5.53 (1.14)	.46	.59	6.06 (0.79)	5.94 (0.89)	.38	.78	.58	.46
Status/Resources	5.79 (1.14)	5.89 (0.95)	.71	.55	4.90 (1.01)	6.07 (0.92)	.57	.65	.57	.50
Desired partner change										
Warmth/Trustworthiness	2.60 (1.29)	2.77 (1.67)	.38	.59	2.95 (1.62)	3.07 (1.48)	.67	.63	.39	.61
Attractiveness/Vitality	2.31 (1.39)	3.03 (1.54)	.29	.47	2.06 (1.35)	2.42 (1.05)	.54	.16[a]	.68	.56
Status/Resources	3.13 (1.85)	2.88 (1.78)	.58	.70	2.54 (1.66)	2.65 (1.58)	.64	.60	.51	.64
Partner regulation										
Warmth/Trustworthiness	2.38 (1.31)	2.33 (1.38)	.45	.54	2.70 (1.60)	2.69 (1.41)	.57	.66	.20[a]	.68
Attractiveness/Vitality	2.25 (1.53)	2.67 (1.49)	.44	.51	1.93 (1.26)	2.30 (1.16)	.37	.37	.64	.33
Status/Resources	2.78 (1.71)	2.45 (1.56)	.49	.64	2.22 (1.44)	2.42 (1.33)	.52	.34	.49	.58

Note. Standard deviations appear in parentheses. Both time 1 and time 2 measures comprise the equivalent 2-item scales described in the method section. *r* at time 1 and 2 are the correlations between the two ratings for each dimension. *r across* time 1 and 2 are the within-subject longitudinal correlations (i.e., measure at time 1 correlated with the equivalent measures at time 2).

All correlations are significant at $p < .05$, except those marked [a], $p > .05$, ns.

Equivalent (short two-item) measures for each construct were then computed for both time 1 and time 2. Table 9 presents descriptive statistics and reliability indexes. The means for each scale were similar to those reported in Study 1 and Study 2, which used the full set of items (see Tables 1 and 4). For each measure assessed at both time periods, the two items tapping each dimension correlated positively and at adequate levels (average r = .54 at time 1 and .52 at time 2). Hence, the items from each dimension were summed and averaged to provide single indexes for each dimension. The final column of Table 9 shows the within-subject longitudinal correlations. For both men and women across all three ideal dimensions, there generally was good consistency for each measure across time. Thus, the short versions of the scales were reasonably reliable.

Participants also completed the 7-item version of the PRQC inventory (Fletcher et al., 200b) to assess perceived relationship quality (see Study 1). The means for each scale were similar to those reported previously (M = 6.13, SD = 0.78 and M = 6.04, SD = 0.70 for women and men respectively) and the scale had good internal reliability (Cronbach alphas = .90 and .88 respectively).

Procedure

Both members of each couple were phoned 6-months after their initial testing session, and each partner verbally responded to the follow-up questionnaires described above. Participants completed the scales in the same order they did in the laboratory. All participants initially completed the relationship quality measure, followed by the ideal-perception consistency and regulation questionnaires (with half of the couples responding to the ideal-consistency scales first, and the other half responding to the regulation scales first). At the completion of the interview, couples were entered into a cash draw for $75.

Results

Cross-lagged analyses. To analyze the cross-lagged relations, I again employed an SEM approach, which allowed me to test the cross-lagged paths for both ideal-perception consistency and regulation simultaneously. The design strategy is illustrated in Figure 13, which displays the cross-time associations for warmth/trustworthiness partner ideal-perception consistency and desired partner change. The double-headed arrows running between the variables measured at time 1 control for the association in these variables within and across partners; thus, any cross-lagged paths are not produced by the initial relationship between ideal-consistency and regulation.

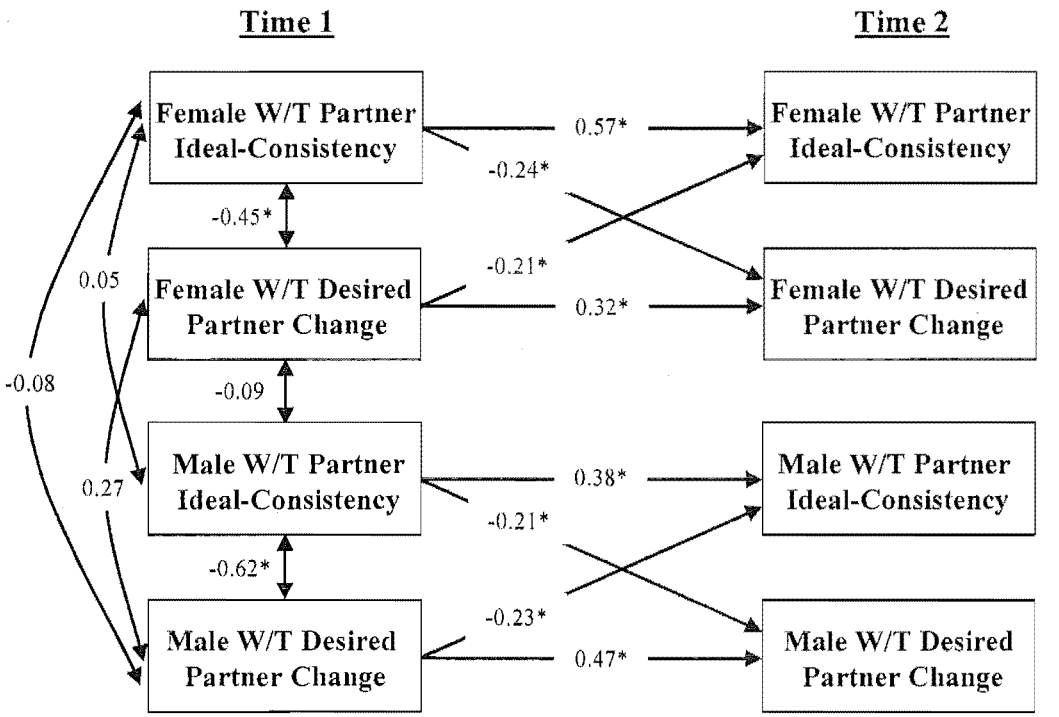

Figure 13. Cross-lagged analysis of warmth/trustworthiness ideal-perception consistency and desired partner change over a 6-month period

Note. Values are standardized regression coefficients. WT = Warmth/Trustworthiness.
*p < .05.

In addition, the longitudinal within-subject paths were routinely set to be equal within gender. For example, in the upper half of Figure 13, the horizontal path from female partner

ideal-consistency at time 1 to female partner ideal-consistency at time 2 was set equal to the path running from female desired partner change at time 1 to female desired partner change at time 2. This was done to ensure that any differences in the cross-lagged paths were not a function of differential reliabilities across measures (which can be a problem with cross-lagged analyses). Lagrange Multiplier tests indicated that, for all analyses, there were no differences in the within-subject longitudinal paths (LM χ^2 (1, 62) = 0.02 to 2.57, *p*s = .90 to .11).

Finally, to test for gender differences, the diagonal paths were pooled across women and men (i.e., each cross-lagged path for women was set equal to the equivalent path for men). None of the cross-lagged paths were significantly different across gender (LM χ^2 (1, 62) = 0.01 to 1.86, *p*s = .93 to .17). Thus, these paths were left constrained.

Over time, I predicted that lower ideal-perception consistency would motivate more desire to change and stronger regulation attempts, and that more desire and stronger attempts to regulate the partner would reduce the consistency between perceptions and ideal standards (see Figure 2, Model 1). As shown in Table 10, solid evidence was found for both predictions. Strikingly, all of the paths were negative, and 9 of the 12 cross-lagged paths were significant for both men and women.

To test whether the cross-lagged results were simply a function of general levels of positivity, I recalculated all the cross-lagged analyses, controlling for relationship length, self-esteem and relationship quality assessed at time 1. The results were unchanged, with all significant cross-lagged paths remaining significant.

Table 10

SEM Coefficients from Cross-lagged Analyses (Study 3)

	Desired partner change as dependent variable		Desired partner change as predictor variable		Partner regulation as dependent variable		Partner regulation as predictor variable	
	Female	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**
Partner ideal-perception consistency								
Warmth/Trustworthiness	-.24*	-.21*	-.21*	-.23*	-.13	-.13	-.21*	-.19*
Attractiveness/Vitality	-.21*	-.37*	-.11	-.11	-.23*	-.35*	-.17	-.14
Status/Resources	-.35*	-.31*	-.21*	-.23*	-.21*	-.20*	-.19*	-.20*

*$p < .05$.

Ideal-perception consistency, regulation and relationship quality. To examine whether ideal-perception consistency, desired change and regulation attempts influenced later judgments of relationship quality I extended the cross-lagged model shown in Figure 13 by adding paths running from both time 2 ideal-perception consistency and desired change/regulation attempts to relationship quality assessed at time 2 (as well as correlating the error terms between time 2 regulation and ideal-consistency). These path coefficients are displayed in Table 11. Across dimensions, strong positive associations were found between ideal-perception consistency and relationship quality. In contrast, desired change and partner regulation attempts were not associated with perceptions of relationship quality. In addition, the significant paths between ideal-perception consistency and relationship quality remained strong and significant when controlling for relationship quality ratings gathered at time 1. Thus, reductions in ideal-consistency across time are associated with decreasing levels of perceived relationship quality.

Table 11

SEM Coefficients for Paths from Ideal-Perception Consistency and Desired Partner Change/ Partner Regulation to Relationship Quality (Time 2)

	Relationship Quality			
	Model with Desired Change		*Model with Regulation Attempts*	
	Female	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**
Partner Ideal-Perception Consistency				
Warmth/Trustworthiness	.41*	.59*	.41*	.61*
Attractiveness/Vitality	.54*	.61*	.59*	.66*
Status/Resources	*.34**	*-.07*	*.39**	*-.02*
Partner Desired Change/Regulation				
Warmth/Trustworthiness	-.01	-.01	.01	.01
Attractiveness/Vitality	.01	.01	.16	.15
Status/Resources	-.12	-.08	.05	.05

Note. All paths were pooled across gender (except for those shown in italics). There were generally no differences in the paths across gender (LM χ^2 (1, 62) = 0.01 to 2.12, *ps* > .05) (see Footnote 12), with the exceptions marked in italics; only women's status/resources partner ideal-perception consistency was significantly associated with relationship quality (LM χ^2 (1, 62) = 5.56 and 5.05, *ps* < .05 for model with desired change and model with regulation attempts). These paths were left unconstrained.

*$p < .05$.

These findings illustrate that the pivotal proximal determinant of relationship evaluation appears to be the consistency across actual perceptions and ideal standards (as opposed to desired change and regulation attempts), and are consistent with the previously reported mediation models suggesting that regulation feeds back into ideal-perception consistency, which in turn influences judgments of relationship quality.

Discussion

The results of Study 3 provide evidence for the bi-directional nature of the connections between ideal-perception consistency and regulation (see Model 1). As predicted, (a) lower perceived consistency between partner perceptions and ideal standards forecasted greater desire to change the partner and motivated more strenuous regulation attempts over time, and (b) greater desire and more attempts to change the partner predicted reduced judgments of partner ideal-perception consistency across time. Moreover, when controlling for the current and longitudinal associations across ideal-perception consistency and desired change/regulation, reductions in ideal-consistency predicted more negative relationship evaluations.

Studies 1 and 2 employed cross-sectional samples to test models of how desire for change and regulation attempts during the previous six months are related to current perceptions of ideal-consistency and, in turn, relationship evaluation. This extension replicated these findings using a longitudinal design, and supported the notion that the impact of regulation on relationship quality occurs via the effects regulation has on ideal-perception consistency (i.e., whether regulation reduces or increases the consistency between

perceptions and ideal standards)[15]. Moreover, the Ideal Standards Model suggests that regulation should be motivated by low ideal-perception consistency. The cross-lagged results support this important prediction.

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[15] Perceived success of regulation attempts was also assessed at Time 2. However, due to the sample attrition in Study 3, and the necessity of examining perceived regulation success for those individuals who reported regulation attempts within the specific dimension, power was extremely low to test for main and (in particular) interaction effects (sample sizes ranged from 27 to 41). Nevertheless, significant interaction effects between regulation and ideal-perception consistency (both measured at time 2) were found on the warmth/trustworthiness dimension for both males and females ($p < .05$), and on the attractiveness/vitality dimension for females ($p < .10$). In each case, the interaction effect replicated the pattern presented in the previous studies. Specifically, individuals who possessed the lowest ideal-perception consistency were those who had tried hard to change their partner but perceived their attempts to be relatively ineffective.

Chapter Six: General Discussion

Extending the Ideal Standards Model (Simpson et al., 2001), the current research tested several novel predictions about the regulation functions of ideal standards in intimate relationships. In particular, I predicted that lower ideal-perception consistency would be associated with stronger desires to change the self or the partner and with more strenuous regulation attempts. However, I also proposed that these links should be specific to both the locus of discrepancy (self versus partner; see Figure 1) and to the mate-evaluation domain under consideration. Both predictions were supported. First, self ideal-perception consistency was associated with a focus on changing the self (but not the partner), whereas partner ideal-perception consistency was associated with a focus on changing the partner (but not the self). Second, in all three studies, regulation processes occurred within specific mate-evaluation dimensions (warmth/trustworthiness, attractiveness/vitality, and status/resources), and were not driven by global evaluation biases associated with the self or the partner or by the possession of modest versus lofty perceptions within each ideal dimension.

General support was also found for three distinct causal models derived from the Ideal Standards Model. First, supporting Model 1 (see Figure 2), lower ideal-perception consistency was associated with both increased motivation and actual regulation attempts, while greater desire and attempts to change self and partner was tied to lower perceptions of ideal-consistency. This latter path may seem counter-intuitive given the aim of regulation attempts is to increase the consistency between perceptions and ideal standards. However, regulation attempts will increase ideal-perception consistency only if such efforts are successful in bringing about change. Unsuccessful regulation attempts, on the other hand, are likely to increase the salience, and perhaps the significance, of the discrepancy. The low levels of perceived regulation success reported within these studies (mean levels ranging

from 2.26 to 3.67 out of an extremely successful pole of 7), indicates that, in general, participants were only able to produce small relationship improvements. Nevertheless, in support of Model 2 (see Figure 2), more successful regulation attempts was associated with relatively higher ideal-perception consistency. Those participants who had engaged in more intensive regulation and failed, however, had the lowest perceptions of ideal-consistency. These predicted interaction effects provide corroborating evidence that regulation may exacerbate ideal discrepancies, particularly if regulatory efforts are unsuccessful.

Finally, the negative links between regulation and ideal-perception consistency filtered through to judgments of relationship quality. Analyses across all three studies demonstrated that higher desire for change and more strenuous partner regulation attempts reduced perceptions of ideal-consistency, which, in turn, fed into more negative relationship evaluations (Figure 2, Model 3). These effects are consistent with the hypothesized feedback loop characteristic of regulation processes, which specifies that desiring and attempting to change partner will impact on relationship quality to the extent that regulation reduces or increases the discrepancy between perceptions and ideal standards.

This research helps to clarify the conditions under which individuals will engage in relationship regulation strategies and highlights the importance of regulation processes for understanding relationship functioning and satisfaction. Below I discuss the dyadic nature of these processes, consider the role of the self in relationship regulation, discuss the implications and novel contributions of this research, and consider several factors that may determine when and how people will regulate their relationship.

The Dyadic Nature of Relationship Regulation

This research breaks new ground by examining how regulation and ideal-consistency operate between partners within romantic relationships. Consistent with previous research

(Campbell et al., 2001), for all three ideal dimensions, I found that perceptions of relationship quality were associated not only with individuals' own judgments of partner ideal-consistency, but also with how closely individuals matched the ideal standards of their *partners*. This important partner effect suggests that participants were sensitive to how they were evaluated by their romantic partners.

Other findings in Study 2 also highlight the nature of relationship interdependence in this domain. With regard to warmth/trustworthiness characteristics, for example, the more individuals desired change, and actually tried to change their partners during the previous six months, the less glowingly their partners evaluated themselves on this dimension. In contrast, for the attractiveness/vitality and status/resources dimensions, more regulation received from the partner did not influence self perceptions, yet was negatively associated with the degree to which individuals believed they matched their partners' ideal standards. One tentative explanation for these findings involves the greater lability and situationally-defined nature of warmth/trustworthiness in comparison to self evaluations of attractiveness/vitality and status/resources. These latter constructs may be more objective and more firmly established, and hence harder to shift.

Whatever the explanation, evidence of these partner effects suggest that the expression of desired change, and actual attempts to change one's partner, convey critical information regarding how individuals feel about their partners. Thus, regulation processes do not merely occur within individuals' heads; they are tied to the objective reality of the relationship. This point is powerfully illustrated by the relatively accurate judgments that men and women produce when evaluating their partners' ideal standards. Correlations between inferred ideal-perception consistency (i.e., ratings of the degree to which individuals believed they matched the ideal standards of their partner) and partners' actual partner ideal-

consistency ratings across all three ideal dimensions were all positive and typically significant (*r*s = .15 to .51, average *r* = .30).

These partner effects are also consistent with previous research and theory suggesting that self regulation may be motivated by perceived discrepancies between self perceptions and either the goals and wishes of significant others (Moretti & Higgins, 1999) or individuals' perceived relational value (Leary, 2004). When individuals recognize that they do not match the ideal standards of their partner or receive regulation attempts from their partner, they should engage in regulatory efforts to boost their partner's evaluation. Because I collected measures of prior regulation behavior and current ideal-perception consistency, I was unable to establish whether regulation from the partner increased subsequent desires and attempts to change the self. Future research should test this hypothesis.

The Role of the Self in Relationship Regulation

Generally speaking, the results confirm the central role of the self as it has been conceptualized in prior versions of the Ideal Standards Model (Campbell et al., 2001; Simpson et al., 2001). In the current research, I provided evidence that individuals evaluate and regulate themselves (i.e., the self vis-à-vis the relationship) using the same three principal dimensions used to evaluate and regulate their partners. For example, CFA analyses revealed that all scales relating to the self conformed to the same tripartite structure as did the partner scales, in accordance with the Ideal Standards Model. In addition, within the three ideal dimensions, greater desires and attempts to change the self were typically associated with lower consistency between current self perceptions and self ideal standards. These findings are consistent with the larger literature on self regulation in non-intimate contexts and with self regulation theories (e.g., self-discrepancy theory, Higgins, 1987, 1997, and control systems theory, Carver & Scheier, 1998).

It is true that the size and consistency of the predicted within-individual effects were not as robust for the self variables as they were for the partner variables. Moreover, self ideal-consistency and self regulation generally were not related to relationship evaluations. Thus, partner discrepancy judgments seemed to play a more powerful proximal role in this research than did self judgments. Interestingly, similar patterns of results have been found in other areas of research on intimate relationships. Research on attributions, for example, has revealed that partner attributions are stronger and more reliable predictors of relationship satisfaction than are self attributions for the same negative events (see, for example, Fletcher & Fincham, 1991; Friesen, Fletcher, & Overall, 2005; Fletcher & Thomas, 2000; Sümer & Cozzarelli, 2004).

One possible explanation for this disparity is the way self and partner ideal-consistency and regulation are interpreted. Individuals may perceive themselves more able to change (and control) their own faults compared with the shortcomings of their partners. Relationship partners may also expect self regulation attempts to be more successful since change in partner requires cooperation and co-action by their partner, and individuals are more able to directly monitor change in self attributes compared to partner attributes. Thus, (compared to desiring change and regulating the self) desired partner change and partner regulation attempts may have stronger implications for perceptions and evaluations of the relationship.

Nevertheless, self judgments should assume a central role in the dynamic interplay among ideal standards, perceptions, and behavior in intimate relationships. Indeed, several findings from this research confirm this claim. First, the existence of the partner effects outlined above indicated that self judgments and mate evaluations were sensitive to the partners' regulation behavior and communication. Second, some unexpected results

(replicated across Studies 1 and 2) indicated that individuals who perceived themselves as unsuccessful at meeting their expectations for self on specific ideal dimensions were more modest in their associated demands for change on the part of their partner (and vice versa). Third, I calculated correlations between individuals' self perceptions of their own standing on the three ideal dimensions with the importance they attached to the same ideal dimensions for a hypothetical partner. The correlations across Studies 1 and 2 were all positive, and eight of the nine correlations were significant at the $p < .05$ level (mean $r = .35$). These results are consistent with prior research (see Fletcher, 2002), and they support the contention that one of the primary determinants for the expectations that individuals establish for romantic partners is their own self-perceived mate value.

Implications and Novel Contributions

This research extends prior regulation theories and research in several ways. These findings illustrate that important goals or standards are prime determinants of motivation and regulation behavior. It might be claimed that we already know this based on prior research. However, this research represents the first time regulation processes have been tested in the context of romantic relationships. This extension is important given that intimate relationships have a substantial impact on personal wellbeing and should be a central domain in which regulation processes are played out.

Second, these studies move beyond previous research by identifying specific links between discrepancy from ideal standards and regulation of either the self or the partner. Thus, the processes traditionally identified as underlying self regulation also appear to explain regulation of close relationship partners.

Third, virtually all regulation theories (explicitly or implicitly) conceptualize regulation processes in terms of circular feedback loops, in which current states (i.e.,

perceptions) are compared to a reference value of some kind (i.e., ideal standards or goals), the effects of resulting regulation are monitored, and these judgments, in turn, influence levels of ideal-perception consistency (e.g., control systems theory, Carver & Scheier, 1998; also see Boekaerts et al., 2000 for examples). Inherent in these accounts is the fundamental role that regulation success should have in moderating the feedback loop. The present research clearly demonstrates the bi-directional associations across ideal-consistency and regulation, and (at least in part) confirms the moderating effect of perceived regulation success.

Fourth, the specific content of the standards that drive regulation has been relatively neglected within the regulation literature. An important contribution of the Ideal Standards Model is the identification of three major dimensions that individuals use to evaluate and regulate self and partner within this context: warmth/trustworthiness, attractiveness/vitality, and status/resources. Past research has focused almost exclusively on how these dimensions influence partner and relationship evaluation. Moving beyond this focus, the current studies show how these ideal dimensions are also implicated in regulation processes. Moreover, to recap, the results indicate that regulation processes work through each of the three ideal constructs rather than being driven by global partner or relationship judgments. This specificity indicates that individuals direct regulation efforts towards those particular aspects of self and partner that are failing to meet expectations.

Fifth and finally, this research makes an important contribution to understanding the measurement and predictive nature of the consistency between perceptions and ideal standards. Ideal-discrepancy within the self-regulation literature is assessed via comparing spontaneously generated lists of attributes describing the actual self and attributes describing the ideal self (see Higgins et al., 1996). This measure is designed to access highly accessible

self-traits (i.e., those that are important to the individual). In addition, participants are not asked to directly compare aspects of themselves against their ideal along specific items (as in this research), because (a) it is assumed that individuals will not always be aware of the discrepancies that influence self evaluation and regulation (Moretti & Higgins, 1999), and (b) there is some evidence that ratings of preselected items have not predicted evaluation and regulation over and above ratings of actual perceptions (e.g., Moretti & Higgins, 1990).

Similarly, within the relationship domain, a variety of indirect measures assessing the consistency across partner perceptions and ideal standards are typically employed, such as within-subject correlations (e.g., Fletcher et al., 1999, 2000a) and the residual approach utilized in Studies 1 and 2 (also see Knee et al., 2002). Such indirect measures are used to overcome the confounding effect of general perceptions. For example, it is entirely possible that either self or partner perceptions drive regulation attempts, rather than the discrepancy between such judgments and expectations or ideal standards.

However, in this research, individuals rated the extent to which both self and partner matched ideal standards (i.e., they were asked to consciously access this information), and such ratings of preselected items produced reliable results that were synonymous with the results obtained with the indirect measure of ideal-consistency (which used residuals from regressing perceptions on ideal standards). A good deal of prior research has supported the pivotal role of the three dimensions of warmth/trustworthiness, attractiveness/vitality and status/resources. This research supports the validity of these three constructs in relationship evaluation and regulation contexts.

Most importantly, I was able to rule out the possibility that global evaluative perceptions of the relationship (versus ideal-perception consistency) were driving regulation by controlling for self and partner perceptions when calculating the associations between

ideal-consistency and regulation desires and attempts. Indeed, when pitting straight perceptions of the self or partner directly against ideal-perception consistency ratings, ideal-consistency continued to predict regulation whereas straightforward perceptions did not. This is an important finding and supports a key principle of the Ideal Standards Model (and prior regulation theories) that regulation occurs in response to low ideal-perception consistency, rather than simply constituting a product of negative perceptions of self or partner.

When do People Regulate their Relationships?

As predicted, I found that both desired change and actual regulation attempts were negatively associated with ideal-perception consistency. However, the sets of correlations among these variables tended to be stronger for desired change, and individuals consistently reported a stronger desire to change than actually making attempts to change either the self or the partner. Thus, dissatisfaction resulting from a discrepancy between perceptions and ideal standards may not always generate efforts to improve ideal-consistency.

Several factors may moderate the links between ideal-perception consistency, associated desired change, and the production of actual regulation attempts. First, the implications of low ideal-consistency are likely to depend upon the importance attached to particular ideal dimensions. Individuals should be more dissatisfied when faced with discrepancies from ideal standards they judge as more important (e.g., warmth/ trustworthiness compared to status/resources), be more likely to make an effort to change these attributes, and may therefore experience a more intense negative reaction to unsuccessful regulation attempts of such pivotal characteristics. Warmth/trustworthiness is generally rated as more important than attractiveness/vitality or status/resources in this and prior research (particularly in long-term relationships). Thus, the importance placed on ideal standards may explain why the effects were most consistent across studies for the warmth/

trustworthiness dimension. Characteristics related to warmth/trustworthiness have great significance for relationship maintenance and stability, and remain important across all phases of the relationship. (See Boldero & Francis, 2000 and Higgins, Shah, & Friedman, 1997 for illustrations of the impact of ideal importance on the emotional and regulatory consequences of low self ideal-consistency.)

Prior research also indicates that the importance of particular attributes are likely to differ across gender and relationship stage (e.g., Fletcher et al., 2004). For example, status/resources may become more important as relationships grow more serious, whereas attractiveness/vitality may become less important. In terms of gender differences, women generally attach higher importance to status/resources partner attributes and are less willing to trade-off these attributes for other characteristics such as attractiveness/vitality. In contrast, men tend to attach higher importance and are less willing to trade-off attractiveness/vitality attributes in their female partners (also see Buss, 1999, and Fletcher, 2002). It seems plausible that such trade-offs will also occur in regulation processes within relationships, with men more likely to regulate the attractiveness/vitality of their partner (and perhaps status/resources of self) than women, and vice versa. The mean differences in regulation desires and attempts across sex described in Studies 1 and 2 provide some preliminary support for this contention.

The tendency to engage in regulation tactics might also depend on the history of regulation successes and failures. Individuals who have been successful in their regulation attempts might be more likely to engage in future efforts to change themselves or their partners. Moreover, individuals may develop a general sense of efficacy that either promotes or hinders future regulation attempts (Bandura, 1992). They also may form attributions about the changeability and controllability of specific characteristics in relationships (e.g., Ruvolo

& Rotondo, 1998; see also Fincham, 2001). Similarly, general implicit relationship theories, such as beliefs that relationships grow and develop through efforts to maintain and improve them, may influence the salience of ideal discrepancies and the likelihood of engaging in regulation tactics (Knee et al., 2003).

Finally, there exist several avenues for reconciling inconsistencies between perceptions and ideal standards. Some strategies may not necessarily be perceived by individuals as attempts to change the partner (e.g., trying to resolve the issue through an objective two-sided discussion). Other strategies are more cognitive than behavioral. For example, individuals might increase ideal-perception consistency by reinterpreting faults or reducing the significance of discrepancies by focusing on positive aspects of the self or partner (e.g., Murray et al., 1996). When past regulation attempts have been repeatedly unsuccessful, the target characteristics may be perceived as too difficult to change and attempts to produce change might be viewed as too threatening. Under these conditions, individuals may resolve ideal discrepancies cognitively rather than via behavioral regulation. Thus, instead of Mary trying to change her partner's status/resources, she could reduce the importance she places on these characteristics (i.e., lower her status/resources ideal standards) and focus on other more salubrious aspects of her partner, such as his sensitive and caring nature (see Fletcher et al., 2000a). Future research should tease out the conditions under which individuals will employ these types of cognitive tactics versus directly attempting to change aspects of the relationship.

How do People Regulate their Relationships?

Across studies, the results demonstrated that relationship regulation has negative implications for self, partner and relationship evaluation. However, these studies provided little information regarding how individuals actually go about regulating themselves and their

partners in relationships, or the differential effects that particular regulation tactics may have on relationship outcomes. As indicated in the prior discussion, people possess a variety of techniques they can draw upon to increase the consistency between perceptions and ideal standards. Which specific strategies are employed should depend on a variety of factors, including the source of the ideal-consistency (self or partner) and the type of discrepancy (warmth/trustworthiness versus attractiveness/vitality). For example, Mary may vigorously approach low self ideal-consistency on the attractiveness/vitality dimension by establishing a strict exercise and diet regime for herself, but deal with the same discrepancy in her partner (John) more passively by encouraging him to tag along to the gym or surreptitiously cooking him healthier meals.

Which strategies individuals engage in will produce different outcomes in terms of regulation success and resulting levels of ideal-consistency and relationship satisfaction. Returning to the above example, encouraging John to join in fitness activities will only be perceived as successful if John agrees to participate, whereas subtly changing the dinner menu will only be perceived as unsuccessful if John either 'cottons on' or complains about the bland course. In addition, successfully increasing John's activity level is likely to have a greater impact on reducing ideal-discrepancies (i.e., changing John's vitality and attractiveness) than the more indirect approach of providing more nutritious meals (in which John does little himself to actively change). Moreover, both of these strategies are reasonably benign ways of attempting to bring about change. More direct strategies, such as criticizing John's appearance, are likely to have greater negative consequences for the relationship, including John's self and partner perceptions, and his levels of relationship satisfaction.

As discussed in the introduction, several studies have examined influence tactics in this kind of context. However, the majority of this research has relied on self-reports, and

have in the main only examined one member of a couple reporting on tactics that they or their partner have used (see Noller et al., 1994 and Orina et al., 2002 for exceptions). Moreover, prior studies have failed to examine (a) whether regulation strategies actually bring about change in self or partner qualities (over time), (b) which strategies are most likely to be successful in bringing about change, or (c) the long-term consequences of successful versus unsuccessful regulation attempts.

To address these issues, I am currently completing a study in which couples involved in long-term relationships were videotaped discussing aspects of themselves and their partner that they would like to change. This study was designed to assess, first, the regulation tactics couples employ, and second, the extent to which couples are successful in their regulation attempts – that is, which strategies actually bring about change. To this end, participating couples were followed up over a 12-month period via 3-month telephone interviews which assessed (a) the extent to which partners demonstrated change in the features that were discussed, (b) perceptions of regulation success, and (c) judgments of relationship quality.

This study should allow the examination of the types of regulation behaviors that are used to increase perceptions of ideal-consistency, which strategies are most successful in bringing about change, and the long-term impact of relationship regulation on relationship satisfaction and stability. For example, in the face of unsuccessful regulation attempts, do relationship partners give up and accept ideal-discrepancies, resort to the cognitive tactics described above, continue attempts to change self and partner (perhaps to the detriment of their relationship), or, alternatively, exit the relationship? When large discrepancies between perceptions and ideal standards on important dimensions simply cannot be closed, individuals may decide to dissolve the relationship.

I was unable to examine the connection between regulation processes and relationship dissolution in the current research because only a small percentage of couples ended their relationship across six months (only 9 out of 62 couples disbanded; Study 3). Nevertheless, I suspect that the negative relationship implications of low ideal-perception consistency, paired with high, but unsuccessful, regulation attempts, should increase the probability of relationship dissolution.

Limitations and Caveats

There remain many unanswered questions about relationship regulation, including the factors that govern when and how regulation occurs, the effectiveness of different regulation strategies and tactics, and their long-term consequences. The current research relied exclusively on self-reports and partner-reports, which raises the question of whether similar results might emerge when other methods (including more behavioral ones) are used. The correlational nature of the data across all three studies also raises issues of causality. The three models presented require further validation using experimental methods to more clearly establish causality.

In addition, although these findings highlight the conditions under which individuals will regulate their relationship (i.e., a lack of consistency between perception and ideal standards), they are less informative regarding the factors that help to explain why some couples will be more (or less) sensitive to low ideal-consistency and hence are more (or less) likely to regulate their relationship. Identifying these moderators is an important step for future research.

Conclusion

As just described, this research has its limitations. Nevertheless, it also has several strengths. They include the systematic replication of results across different studies and different measurement strategies, statistically controlling for several potential artifacts, and utilizing both cross-sectional and longitudinal designs.

Understanding when, how, and why individuals try to change their partners and their relationships are crucial questions for the science of relationships. Yet, researchers are only just beginning to study these phenomena. The current studies provide some initial steps toward answering such questions and affirm the important role that ideal standards play in regulation processes as they unfold in romantic relationships.

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Appendix A

Questionnaires Developed from the Partner Ideal Scales (Fletcher, Simpson, Thomas & Giles, 1999)

Rate each factor below in terms of the importance that each factor has in describing your IDEAL PARTNER in a close relationship (dating, living together, or married). Circle ONE number in each scale.

Understanding

Very Unimportant 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **Very Important**

Supportive

Very Unimportant 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **Very Important**

Kind

Very Unimportant 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **Very Important**

Good Listener

Very Unimportant 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **Very Important**

Sensitive

Very Unimportant 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **Very Important**

Considerate

Very Unimportant 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **Very Important**

Sexy

Very Unimportant 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **Very Important**

Nice Body

Very Unimportant 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **Very Important**

Attractive Appearance

Very Unimportant 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **Very Important**

Good Lover

Very Unimportant 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **Very Important**

Outgoing

Very Unimportant 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **Very Important**

Adventurous

Very Unimportant 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **Very Important**

Successful (or potential to succeed)

Very Unimportant 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **Very Important**

Nice house (or potential to attain)

Very Unimportant 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **Very Important**

Financially secure (or potential to achieve)

Very Unimportant 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **Very Important**

Dresses well (or potential to dress well)

Very Unimportant 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **Very Important**

Good Job (or potential to attain).

Very Unimportant 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **Very Important**

Intelligent

Very Unimportant 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **Very Important**

Rate each factor below in terms of how accurately it describes your CURRENT ROMANTIC PARTNER. Circle ONE number in each scale.

Understanding

Not at all like my partner	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Very much like my partner**

Supportive

Not at all like my partner	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Very much like my partner**

Kind

Not at all like my partner	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Very much like my partner**

Good Listener

Not at all like my partner	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Very much like my partner**

Sensitive

Not at all like my partner	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Very much like my partner**

Considerate

Not at all like my partner	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Very much like my partner**

Sexy

Not at all like my partner	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Very much like my partner**

Nice Body

Not at all like my partner	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Very much like my partner**

Attractive Appearance

Not at all like my partner	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Very much like my partner**

Good Lover

Not at all like my partner	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Very much like my partner**

Outgoing

Not at all like my partner	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Very much like my partner**

Adventurous

Not at all like my partner	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Very much like my partner**

Successful (or potential to succeed)

Not at all like my partner	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Very much like my partner**

Nice house (or potential to attain)

Not at all like my partner	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Very much like my partner**

Financially secure (or potential to achieve)

Not at all like my partner	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Very much like my partner**

Dresses well (or potential to dress well)

Not at all like my partner	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Very much like my partner**

Good Job (or potential to attain).

Not at all like my partner	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Very much like my partner**

Intelligent

Not at all like my partner	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Very much like my partner**

On this scale you will rate how closely your partner meets your ideals. For each item consider how your partner compares to your expectations in terms of your ideal partner.

For example, if you think your partner's level of understanding matches how you ideally would like your partner to be on this attribute, circle 7 for the first item. If your partner only moderately meets your ideals for understanding, circle 4, and if your partner does not meet your ideals on this attribute at all, circle 1.

Rate each factor below in terms of the extent to which your CURRENT ROMANTIC PARTNER MATCHES YOUR IDEAL on each attribute. Circle ONE number in each scale.

Understanding

Does not match my ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Completely matches my ideal**

Supportive

Does not match my ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Completely matches my ideal**

Kind

Does not match my ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Completely matches my ideal**

Good Listener

Does not match my ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Completely matches my ideal**

Sensitive

Does not match my ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Completely matches my ideal**

Considerate

Does not match my ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Completely matches my ideal**

Sexy

Does not match my ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Completely matches my ideal**

Nice Body

Does not match my ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Completely matches my ideal**

Attractive Appearance

Does not match my ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Completely matches my ideal**

Good Lover

Does not match my ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Completely matches my ideal**

Outgoing

Does not match my ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Completely matches my ideal**

Adventurous

Does not match my ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Completely matches my ideal**

Successful (or potential to succeed)

Does not match my ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Completely matches my ideal**

Nice house (or potential to attain)

Does not match my ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Completely matches my ideal**

Financially secure (or potential to achieve)

Does not match my ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Completely matches my ideal**

Dresses well (or potential to dress well)

Does not match my ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Completely matches my ideal**

Good Job (or potential to attain).

Does not match my ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Completely matches my ideal**

Intelligent

Does not match my ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Completely matches my ideal**

Rate each factor below in terms of the importance that each factor has in describing how YOU IDEALLY WOULD LIKE TO BE in a close relationship setting (dating, living together, or married). Circle ONE number in each scale.

For example, if you think it is very important for you to be understanding in your relationship and you would therefore ideally like to be very understanding, circle 7 for the first item. If, however, understanding is very unimportant in terms of how you would ideally like to be in your relationship, circle 1. If understanding is moderately important, circle 4.

Understanding								
Very Unimportant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Very Important**
Supportive								
Very Unimportant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Very Important**
Kind								
Very Unimportant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Very Important**
Good Listener								
Very Unimportant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Very Important**
Sensitive								
Very Unimportant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Very Important**
Considerate								
Very Unimportant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Very Important**
Sexy								
Very Unimportant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Very Important**
Nice Body								
Very Unimportant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Very Important**
Attractive Appearance								
Very Unimportant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Very Important**
Good Lover								
Very Unimportant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Very Important**
Outgoing								
Very Unimportant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Very Important**
Adventurous								
Very Unimportant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Very Important**

Successful (or potential to succeed)

Very Unimportant 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **Very Important**

Nice house (or potential to attain)

Very Unimportant 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **Very Important**

Financially secure (or potential to achieve)

Very Unimportant 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **Very Important**

Dresses well (or potential to dress well)

Very Unimportant 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **Very Important**

Good Job (or potential to attain).

Very Unimportant 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **Very Important**

Intelligent

Very Unimportant 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **Very Important**

Rate each factor below in terms of how accurately it describes YOURSELF. Circle ONE number in each scale.

Understanding

Not at all like myself 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **Very much like myself**

Supportive

Not at all like myself 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **Very much like myself**

Kind

Not at all like myself 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **Very much like myself**

Good Listener

Not at all like myself 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **Very much like myself**

Sensitive

Not at all like myself 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **Very much like myself**

Considerate

Not at all like myself 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **Very much like myself**

Sexy

Not at all like myself 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **Very much like myself**

Nice Body

Not at all like myself 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **Very much like myself**

Attractive Appearance

Not at all like myself 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **Very much like myself**

Good Lover

Not at all like myself 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **Very much like myself**

Outgoing

Not at all like myself 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **Very much like myself**

Adventurous

Not at all like myself 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **Very much like myself**

Successful (or potential to succeed)

Not at all like myself 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **Very much like myself**

Nice house (or potential to attain)

Not at all like myself 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **Very much like myself**

Financially secure (or potential to achieve)

Not at all like myself 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **Very much like myself**

Dresses well (or potential to dress well)

Not at all like myself 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **Very much like myself**

Good Job (or potential to attain).

Not at all like myself 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **Very much like myself**

Intelligent

Not at all like myself 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **Very much like myself**

On this scale you will rate how closely you meet your own ideals. For each item consider how you compare to your expectations in terms of how you would ideally like to be in the context of your close romantic relationship.

For example, if you think your level of understanding matches how you ideally would like to be on this attribute, circle 7 for the first item. If you only moderately meet your ideals for understanding, circle 4, and if you do not meet your ideals on this attribute at all, circle 1.

Rate each factor below in terms of the extent to which YOU MATCH YOUR IDEAL on this attribute. Circle ONE number in each scale.

Understanding

I do not match my ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**I completely match my ideal**

Supportive

I do not match my ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**I completely match my ideal**

Kind

I do not match my ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**I completely match my ideal**

Good Listener

I do not match my ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**I completely match my ideal**

Sensitive

I do not match my ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**I completely match my ideal**

Considerate

I do not match my ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**I completely match my ideal**

Sexy

I do not match my ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**I completely match my ideal**

Nice Body

I do not match my ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**I completely match my ideal**

Attractive Appearance

I do not match my ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**I completely match my ideal**

Good Lover

I do not match my ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**I completely match my ideal**

Outgoing

I do not match my ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**I completely match my ideal**

Adventurous

I do not match my ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**I completely match my ideal**

Successful (or potential to succeed)

I do not match my ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**I completely match my ideal**

Nice house (or potential to attain)

I do not match my ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**I completely match my ideal**

Financially secure (or potential to achieve)

I do not match my ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**I completely match my ideal**

Dresses well (or potential to dress well)

I do not match my ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**I completely match my ideal**

Good Job (or potential to attain).

I do not match my ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**I completely match my ideal**

Intelligent

I do not match my ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**I completely match my ideal**

On this scale you will rate what your partner thinks of you. For each item consider how your partner would rate you in terms of his/her ideal.

For example, if your partner thinks you are very understanding and you match his/her ideal on this attribute, circle 7 for the first item. If your partner thinks you only moderately meet his/her ideals for understanding, circle 4, and if your partner believes you do not meet his/her ideals on this attribute at all, circle 1.

Rate each factor below in terms of the extent to which you believe YOU MATCH YOUR PARTNER'S IDEAL on this attribute. Circle ONE number in each scale.

Understanding

I do not match my partner's ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**I completely match my partner's ideal**

Supportive

I do not match my partner's ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**I completely match my partner's ideal**

Kind

I do not match my partner's ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**I completely match my partner's ideal**

Good Listener

I do not match my partner's ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**I completely match my partner's ideal**

Sensitive

I do not match my partner's ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**I completely match my partner's ideal**

Considerate

I do not match my partner's ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**I completely match my partner's ideal**

Sexy

I do not match my partner's ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**I completely match my partner's ideal**

Nice Body

I do not match my partner's ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**I completely match my partner's ideal**

Attractive Appearance

I do not match my partner's ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**I completely match my partner's ideal**

Good Lover

I do not match my partner's ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**I completely match my partner's ideal**

Outgoing

I do not match my partner's ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**I completely match my partner's ideal**

Adventurous

I do not match my partner's ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**I completely match my partner's ideal**

Successful (or potential to succeed)

I do not match my partner's ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**I completely match my partner's ideal**

Nice house (or potential to attain)

I do not match my partner's ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**I completely match my partner's ideal**

Financially secure (or potential to achieve)

I do not match my partner's ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**I completely match my partner's ideal**

Dresses well (or potential to dress well)

I do not match my partner's ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**I completely match my partner's ideal**

Good Job (or potential to attain).

I do not match my partner's ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**I completely match my partner's ideal**

Intelligent

I do not match my partner's ideal at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**I completely match my partner's ideal**

Everybody has times when they would like to change something about their intimate partner. Listed below are various partner attributes. Think back over the last SIX MONTHS. For each attribute, rate the extent to which you have:

(a) **desired change** in this aspect of your **partner** over the last six months,

(b) actually **tried in some way** to change this aspect of your **partner** over the last 6 months, and

(c) been **successful** in any attempts to change this aspect of your **partner**.

NOTE: If you have not tried at all to change this aspect of your partner (i.e., indicated 1 for question b), please circle 1 for the third question regarding how successful attempts have been.

Understanding

Absolutely **no desire to change** *this aspect of my partner*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strong desire to change** *this aspect of my partner*
Have **not tried at all to change** *this aspect of my partner*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	*Have* **tried hard to change** *this aspect of my partner*
My **attempts** *to change this aspect of my partner* **have not been successful**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	*My* **attempts** *to change this aspect of my partner* **have been successful**

Supportive

No desire to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strong desire to change**
Not tried at all to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Tried hard to change**
Attempts have not been successful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Attempts have been successful**

Kind

No desire to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strong desire to change**
Not tried at all to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Tried hard to change**
Attempts have not been successful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Attempts have been successful**

Good Listener

No desire to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strong desire to change**
Not tried at all to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Tried hard to change**
Attempts have not been successful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Attempts have been successful**

Sensitive

No desire to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strong desire to change**
Not tried at all to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Tried hard to change**
Attempts have not been successful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Attempts have been successful**

Considerate

No desire to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strong desire to change**
Not tried at all to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Tried hard to change**
Attempts have not been successful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Attempts have been successful**

Sexy

No desire to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strong desire to change**
Not tried at all to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Tried hard to change**
Attempts have not been successful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Attempts have been successful**

Nice Body

No desire to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strong desire to change**
Not tried at all to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Tried hard to change**
Attempts have not been successful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Attempts have been successful**

Attractive Appearance

No desire to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strong desire to change**
Not tried at all to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Tried hard to change**
Attempts have not been successful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Attempts have been successful**

Good Lover

No desire to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strong desire to change**
Not tried at all to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Tried hard to change**
Attempts have not been successful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Attempts have been successful**

Outgoing

No desire to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strong desire to change**
Not tried at all to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Tried hard to change**
Attempts have not been successful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Attempts have been successful**

Adventurous

No desire to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strong desire to change**
Not tried at all to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Tried hard to change**
Attempts have not been successful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Attempts have been successful**

Successful (or potential to succeed)

No desire to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strong desire to change**
Not tried at all to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Tried hard to change**
Attempts have not been successful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Attempts have been successful**

Nice house (or potential to attain)

No desire to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strong desire to change**
Not tried at all to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Tried hard to change**
Attempts have not been successful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Attempts have been successful**

Financially secure (or potential to achieve)

No desire to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strong desire to change**
Not tried at all to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Tried hard to change**
Attempts have not been successful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Attempts have been successful**

Dresses well (or potential to dress well)

No desire to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strong desire to change**
Not tried at all to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Tried hard to change**
Attempts have not been successful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Attempts have been successful**

Good Job (or potential to attain).

No desire to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strong desire to change**
Not tried at all to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Tried hard to change**
Attempts have not been successful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Attempts have been successful**

Intelligent

No desire to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strong desire to change**
Not tried at all to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Tried hard to change**
Attempts have not been successful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Attempts have been successful**

Everybody has times when they would like to change something about themselves in the context of their relationship. Listed below are various self attributes. Think back over the last SIX MONTHS. For each attribute, rate the extent to which you have:

(a) **desired change** in this aspect of **yourself** in the last six months,

(b) actually **tried in some way** to change this aspect of **yourself** in the last six months, and

(c) been **successful** in any attempts to change this aspect of **yourself**.

NOTE: If you have not tried at all to change this aspect of yourself (i.e., indicated 1 for question b), please circle 1 for the third question regarding how successful attempts have been.

Understanding

Absolutely **no desire to change** *this aspect of myself*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strong desire to change** *this aspect of myself*
Have **not tried at all to change** *this aspect of myself*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	*Have* **tried hard to change** *this aspect of myself*
My **attempts** *to change this aspect of myself* **have not been successful**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	*My* **attempts** *to change this aspect of myself* **have been successful**

Supportive

No desire to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strong desire to change**
Not tried at all to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Tried hard to change**
Attempts have not been successful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Attempts have been successful**

Kind

No desire to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strong desire to change**
Not tried at all to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Tried hard to change**
Attempts have not been successful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Attempts have been successful**

Good listener

No desire to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strong desire to change**
Not tried at all to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Tried hard to change**
Attempts have not been successful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Attempts have been successful**

Sensitive

No desire to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strong desire to change**
Not tried at all to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Tried hard to change**
Attempts have not been successful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Attempts have been successful**

Considerate

No desire to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strong desire to change**
Not tried at all to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Tried hard to change**
Attempts have not been successful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Attempts have been successful**

Sexy

No desire to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strong desire to change**
Not tried at all to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Tried hard to change**
Attempts have not been successful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Attempts have been successful**

Nice body

No desire to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strong desire to change**
Not tried at all to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Tried hard to change**
Attempts have not been successful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Attempts have been successful**

Attractive appearance

No desire to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strong desire to change**
Not tried at all to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Tried hard to change**
Attempts have not been successful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Attempts have been successful**

Good lover

No desire to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strong desire to change**
Not tried at all to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Tried hard to change**
Attempts have not been successful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Attempts have been successful**

Outgoing

No desire to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strong desire to change**
Not tried at all to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Tried hard to change**
Attempts have not been successful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Attempts have been successful**

Adventurous

No desire to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strong desire to change**
Not tried at all to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Tried hard to change**
Attempts have not been successful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Attempts have been successful**

Successful (or potential to succeed)

No desire to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strong desire to change**
Not tried at all to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Tried hard to change**
Attempts have not been successful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Attempts have been successful**

Nice house (or potential to attain)

No desire to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strong desire to change**
Not tried at all to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Tried hard to change**
Attempts have not been successful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Attempts have been successful**

Financially secure (or potential to achieve)

No desire to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strong desire to change**
Not tried at all to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Tried hard to change**
Attempts have not been successful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Attempts have been successful**

Dresses well (or potential to dress well)

No desire to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strong desire to change**
Not tried at all to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Tried hard to change**
Attempts have not been successful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Attempts have been successful**

Good job (or potential to attain)

No desire to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strong desire to change**
Not tried at all to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Tried hard to change**
Attempts have not been successful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Attempts have been successful**

Intelligent

No desire to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Strong desire to change**
Not tried at all to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Tried hard to change**
Attempts have not been successful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	**Attempts have been successful**

Appendix B

Regression and SEM Analyses of Ideal-Perception Consistency and Perceptions Predicting Desired Change and Regulation

Table B1. Standardized Regression Coefficients for all Dimensions Testing Whether Ideal-Perception Consistency Predicts Desired Change and Regulation Attempts when Controlling for Perceptions (Study 1)

	r between Ideal-Perception Consistency and Perceptions	Regression Coefficients	
		Ideal-Perception Consistency	Perceptions
Partner			
Desired Change			
Warmth/Trustworthiness	.88**	-.59**	-.16
Vitality/Attractiveness	.72**	-.45**	-.20*
Status/Resources	.69**	-.40**	-.13
Regulation Attempts			
Warmth/Trustworthiness		-.60**	.02
Vitality/Attractiveness		-.26**	-.24*
Status/Resources		-.29**	-.07
Self			
Desired Change			
Warmth/Trustworthiness	.80**	-.44**	-.05
Vitality/Attractiveness	.67**	-.29**	.01
Status/Resources	.60**	-.29**	-.03
Regulation Attempts			
Warmth/Trustworthiness		-.31**	.00
Vitality/Attractiveness		-.21*	.07
Status/Resources		-.14	.01

Note. Regressions were run with both ideal-perception consistency and perceptions as simultaneous predictors. These analyses could only be run with the direct measure of ideal-perception consistency since the perception ratings form part of the indirect measure of ideal-consistency.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table B2. SEM Coefficients for Paths from Ideal-Perception Consistency and Perceptions to Desired Change and Regulation Attempts for both Self and Partner (Study 2)

	r between Ideal-Perception Consistency and Perceptions		Ideal-Perception Consistency Path Coefficients		Perceptions Path Coefficients	
	Female	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**
Partner						
Desired Change						
Warmth/Trustworthiness	.84*	.75*	-.42*	-.38*	*.17*	*-.47**
Vitality/Attractiveness	.66*	.77*	-.49*	-.44*	-.16	-.16
Status/Resources	.68*	.70*	-.40*	-.30*	-.05	-.06
Regulation Attempts						
Warmth/Trustworthiness			-.38*	-.34*	*.30*	*-.39**
Vitality/Attractiveness			-.43*	-.40*	-.11	-.12
Status/Resources			-.23	-.18	.01	.02
Self						
Desired Change						
Warmth/Trustworthiness	.79*	.68*	-.05	-.06	-.21	-.22
Vitality/Attractiveness	.59*	.58*	-.46*	-.39*	.06	.05
Status/Resources	.45*	.60*	-.51*	-.40*	.20*	.21*
Regulation Attempts						
Warmth/Trustworthiness			-.04	-.04	-.12	-.12
Vitality/Attractiveness			-.33*	-.26*	.17	.14
Status/Resources			*-.46**	*-.07*	.28*	.29*

Note. These analyses could only be run with the direct measure of ideal-perception consistency since the perception ratings form part of the indirect measure of ideal-consistency. All paths were pooled across gender (except those in italics). There were generally no differences in the paths across gender (LM χ^2 (1, 62) = 0.00 to 3.56, *p*s = .98 to .06), with three exceptions (marked in italics). Males' warmth/trustworthiness partner perceptions, but not females', remained a significant predictor of desired partner change and partner regulation (LM χ^2 (1, 62) = 4.93 and 4.90, *p*s < .05, respectively), and only females' status/resources self ideal-perception consistency remained a significant predictor of self regulation (LM χ^2 (1, 62) = 4.20, $p < .05$).

* $p < .05$.